

ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING-CENTERED CHANGES IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS

By

HELTON M. ALDRIDGE, JR.

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by

Helton M. Aldridge, Jr.

DEDICATION

To my father, Helton M. Aldridge, Sr., who taught me to reach for the stars

To my mother, Virginia Lee Aldridge, who always believed

To my wife, Paulette, for understanding during the difficult times

To my daughter, Shannon, who knew Dad could do it

To my fellow traveler, Judy Bilsky, whose, strength, courage and integrity
guided me on this journey.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	7
Delimitations and Limitations	9
Need for the Study	10
Assumptions	11
Definition of Terms	11
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	14
Student Persistence	14
The Learning College	17
Learning Environment	20
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	25
Purpose of the Study	25
Research Design	26
Rationale for the Method	27
Procedures	28
Sampling Plan	28
Data Collection	28
Data Analysis: Grounded Theory	29
Summary	31
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	32
Purpose	32
Overview of Methodology	32
Presentation of Data	33
Description of Sample	34

Perceptions at Community College A	35
Perceptions at Community College B	61
Summary	85
5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	86
Summary	86
Conclusions	95
Recommendations	97
Topics for Further Study	98
APPENDIX	
A EXPERT PANEL	100
B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY, STAFF, ADMINISTRATION ...	101
C STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE	103
REFERENCES	106
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	110

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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With the renewed interest in creating learning-centered colleges and in student success/completion, community colleges in the state of Florida now, more than ever, are evaluating their institutions with learning-centered criteria in mind. Community colleges, with their open-door policy, continually attract the underprepared student, the displaced homemaker, the unemployed/laid off worker, the single parent, and the person in need of upgrading specific skills, as well as the 18-year-old high school graduate. Many of these potential students have not attended school for years, and therefore approach the idea of becoming a student with a certain level of trepidation. Recent high school graduates may experience a similar level of anxiety or, conversely, bring with them a level of overconfidence that soon vanishes, leaving them overwhelmed and rapidly falling behind. The traditional community-college student of the 21st century, by definition, was the nontraditional student of the 20th century. This challenging situation requires

community-college administrators, faculty, and staff to be proactive in planning responses to the educational needs of this diverse group of students.

Applying learning-centered theory to the situation requires a holistic approach to the educational milieu. This holistic approach must include all aspects of the student's contact with the institution, both inside and outside the classroom. Our study looked at what two Florida community colleges have done to create a campus environment that promotes the learning college concept/environment. One college has been identified as a leader in the learning-centered movement; the other is just beginning this move, starting with significant changes to the delivery of student services. Through the design of surroundings (which are visually welcoming, physically comfortable, and psychologically nonthreatening); personnel training; access to services and technology; and policy and procedure change, this institution hopes to move student services into a full partnership with academics in creating a learning-centered environment. Using the case-study method, we investigated the purposeful creation of a "staying" or nurturing environment and its impact on student, faculty, and staff perceptions.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The classroom mission has taken precedent in many community colleges, through the learning-centered method. It is widely acknowledged that all areas within an institution play a vital role in the ultimate success of the student and the institution.

For community colleges that want to become more learning centered it will make a difference in policies, programs, and practices if learning is embedded in the institutional culture as the highest priority. Community colleges that wish to make this perspective an integral part of their culture can ask two basic questions that will keep faculty, staff trustees, and administrators focused on the major goal: (a) Does this action improve and expand learning?, and (b) How do we know this action improves and expands learning? These two questions can be applied to any area of activity in an institution to help its members become more aware of the importance of learning in everyday practice. (O'Banion, 1999, p. 2)

The current literature on learning-centered methodologies shows the importance of a broad-based approach to providing the student with the widest varieties of learning opportunities possible. This would include activities both inside and outside the traditional classroom. In that light, at community colleges across the nation, enrollment management has recently come to the forefront (in the areas of student affairs and student development) as the dominant methodology for dealing with student retention, recruitment, marketing, and related student services. Under this broad umbrella of enrollment management, student affairs administrators find themselves taking a fresh look at the role and responsibility of their departments. This review has allowed for the inclusion of the learning centered approach to education as a driving force within the operational structure of student affairs departments and divisions.

While faculty oversee classroom activities, the student affairs administrator is responsible for such critical areas as admissions, records, advising, counseling, assessment, testing placement, and services for students with disabilities; and in some institutions, financial aid. While these areas have historically provided services to students, in light of a more holistic approach, it becomes necessary to go far beyond this limiting view of their function. In terms of student success and learning-centeredness, the important factors are what services are provided by student affairs, how they provide these services, and the context or environment in which the services are provided.

These changes in postsecondary education over the past 5 years have dramatically altered the theater in which community colleges operate. Proprietary schools; corporate, trade, and industry schools; and private sector training have increasingly moved the community college out of the only game in town position and made it a competing entity in this educational context. It is increasingly evident that how community colleges do business, and the types of services they offer their students, must be as progressive and dynamic as the environment in which they now find themselves. To this end, enrollment management and the revitalizing opportunities it brings with it, offer student affairs administrators a fresh palate with which to paint a new image of student affairs for the 21st century. With this in mind, a variety of new concerns become part of the student affairs professional's world. The idea of campus environment, campus culture, and civility in the delivery of services and in dealings with students (Strange & Banning, 2001) must now become key elements in the planning and implementation of programs and services. Starting from the assumption that student success is the goal of the community college, and that it is the responsibility of the faculty and staff to facilitate this success, it then becomes important to understand the relationship between the

academic side of the house and the student-affairs side. In the past, a rift between these two has existed, with each side blaming the other for a variety of operational ills. The learning-centered approach requires that this rift, if it still exists, be bridged so that both sides work together to accomplish the goal of student success. To do so, it is imperative that student affairs be viewed as a full and equal partner in this endeavor. "The new 'science' of management and leadership that prescribes flattened organizations, open communication, and empowered participation makes a strong case for involving all stakeholders in major reform efforts" (O'Banion, 1999, p. 23).

While our study was not meant to be a retention study, the link between the learning-centered philosophy and its benefits to retention and student persistence are obvious. The learning-centered approach is focused on students becoming successful learners and achieving their educational goals. This, of course, cannot happen if the student chooses not to persist. Therefore, an understanding and melding of learning-centered theory and retention theory is beneficial if significant learning-centered change within student affairs is to be achieved. Additionally the partnership between academics and student affairs becomes a critical component of this change. The work of Vincent Tinto (1975, 1984) provides a graphic representation that begins to give us a sense of this partnership (Figure 1-1).

Two major components of Tinto's (1975, 1984) longitudinal-process model for student persistence are academic integration and social integration. Since the literature shows us that 80% of the students who drop out of college do so for reasons other than academic problems, the idea of social integration becomes one of major importance in student success; and one that, for the most part, has been overlooked until recently in the community college setting. A major component of Tinto's model is the student's

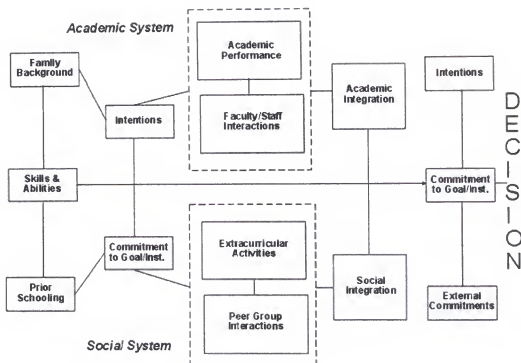


Figure 1-1. Tinto's model of student departure (Tinto, 1987, p. 114)

commitment to the institution. This commitment translates into the student's desire to become affiliated with a particular institution of higher education. While this very well may be a driving factor for university-bound students, Tinto postulated that in the community college, while commitment still plays a key role, there is a reversal in how this phenomenon functions in the equation of student persistence. Work by Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) showed that institutional factors such as administrative policies, academic standards, and image impacts student behavior and educational outcomes. Over 50% of community college students surveyed (Stahl & Pavel, 1992) expressed "a very neutral and transitory view of their institution" (Bilsky, 2000, p. 20).

Given this evidence that community-college students typically enroll with a variety of goals and varying degrees of educational commitment, a new model for community college student success becomes paramount, making the commitment of the

institution the nexus of the Alpha Beta paradigm, a component not fully emphasized in the Tinto model.

For community colleges, it seems that the commitment of the institution to the student, rather than vice versa, is the major factor in whether the student persists and succeeds in reaching his or her educational goal. This commitment can be expressed in a number of ways. The quality of teaching faculty at the institution; the variety and breadth of curriculum; the resources available to students (both academic and social); the appearance of the campus, buildings, classrooms and offices; the ease of access for all students to these resources; and the attitude of all support staff are all important components of this theory. Institutional commitment in the community-college setting becomes a critical factor in determining whether a student chooses to persist or drop out.

Through grounded theory, our study developed a new model for student success at the community college. Using Tinto's Longitudinal Process Model as a starting point, the Alpha Beta Paradigm (Figure 1-2) more appropriately describes the longitudinal progression of students through the community-college process, ultimately resulting in the student's success or goal achievement. In this model, success goes beyond mere degree attainment and encompasses the variety of options available to the community-college student. The model takes into consideration the full partnership of academic and student affairs, as well as the commitment of the institution to the student—a component not found in the Tinto model. The AB paradigm includes the holistic nature of institution/student interactions and provides a frame of reference for community college practitioners to evaluate their own institutional setting. It also provides a valuable tool for the transformation of student affairs within the context of learning-centeredness.

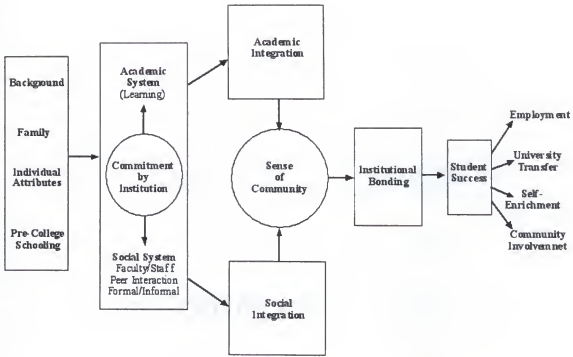


Figure 1-2. Alpha/beta community college student success model (Aldridge & Bilsky, 1995, p. 6)

The germane portion of Figure 1-2 is the institutional commitment cell. This reflects a commitment by the institution to create an environment supportive of learning in its fullest sense. This is a departure from many current theoretical models where institutional commitment describes the student's commitment to the institution (how strong is the student's desire to enroll at a particular institution). Tinto, Astin, and others used this line of thinking with universities in mind and where a student's ultimate goal is degree completion. With the open enrollment found at community colleges, the Alpha Beta Paradigm/model is much more appropriate since students enter community colleges with a variety of goals in mind. Institutional commitment can also be considered a significant part of the institution's desire to move to a learning-centered approach. This could be considered the institution's demonstration of "walking the walk," and it can be illustrated by the institution's allocation of resources, money, time, facilities, and support

to initiatives that are defined as being learning centered. Gleazer (1999) gave credance to the importance of the institutional-commitment dynamic when he observed "we are not building a college with a student. The question we ought to ask is whether the college is . . . student material" (p. iii).

Statement of the Problem

Our study examined the phenomenon of student, faculty, staff, and administrative perceptions of the link between learning-centered philosophy and environmental change within student affairs at two Florida Community colleges. This qualitative study investigated learning-centeredness and environmental change and they effects on student, faculty, and staff perceptions. Recent growth in the learning-centered movement in community colleges, and the lack of understanding of its holistic nature by community college professionals, led to the need for our study. Our study expands the body of knowledge concerning learning-centeredness and the effect of environmental factors on student's institutional perceptions.

The following question framed the study: Did environmental changes affect student, faculty, staff, and administrative perceptions of the institution of attendance/employment, and thereby promote the "learning-centered" concept at a Florida community college? This broad question was refined and focused, culminating in our building a theory regarding the learning-centered concept, student-institution interaction, and environmental changes.

Our study identified two major issues: Can student affairs administrators become institutional integrators of learning-centered change? How can they effectively take on this charge and implement it? Starting from the very basic position of what happens when a potential student comes on campus, it is necessary to begin evaluating the system

and its processes from the student's perspective. Involving students in this evaluation is critical because what appears to administrators to be important or necessary may hold less importance from the student's perspective for their success in moving through the system. Administrators are not always accurately attuned to the student's world.

Student-affairs administrators must look at access to services, service providers, quality of resources, quantity of resources, and the physical environment (campus, buildings, entrance areas, classrooms, offices, work areas) to determine their appropriateness in the context of a learning-centered environment. Resources can be organized by considering the seven key functions that The League for Innovation in the Community College (O'Banion, 1987) postulated as necessary for assuring student success:

- Define processes for student intake, monitor progress, and document student outcomes.
- Develop processes that encourage student association and involvement with the college.
- Provide a full range and schedule of services to permit students to benefit from college programs.
- Prescribe and provide programs that assure student competence in specified academic and skills areas.
- Coordinate programs with secondary schools, other colleges, universities, and business and industry.
- Use state-of-the-art technology to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to students to prepare them for productive lives in an increasingly technological society.
- Develop and implement long-range hiring plans and comprehensive staff-development programs to assure that all college staff possesses the competence required to help students succeed in their educational pursuits.

Other researchers have noted that,

Such a comprehensive student affairs program mandates the delivery of a strongly integrated and dynamic array of services that are aligned with the academic

administrative areas and the faculty. A program of this nature is intended to develop institutional and personal behaviors, a culture if you will, that is student centered and committed to the success of each student. Programs with these characteristics integrate the talents, resources and energies of the academic and student affairs communities to provide a relevant and holistic college experience for students. (Ender, Chand, & Thornton, 1996, p. 75)

Through this learning-centered approach, the student develops a true identification of self with the institution and develops cognizance of an ongoing symbiotic relationship (Bilsky, 2000). The student comes to understand the benefits of becoming enmeshed with the institution. The institution, in turn, rewards this loyalty, both tangibly and intangibly. For their efforts, students can become more visible in the administrative/instructional framework of the college, many times developing into student leaders whose input becomes respected and well-received. The institution benefits because this direct student feedback allows needs to be identified and addressed before they become actual concerns or problems.

Delimitations and Limitations

The following confinements were observed in conducting the case study.

Delimitations

- We explored student perceptions of and reactions to a purposeful effort by administrators at Community College B to design and create a positive, learning-centered student affairs environment.
- Our study was limited to students enrolled during Spring 2004 and Summer 2004 at Community College B and Community College A. Faculty, staff, and administrators were interviewed during the same timeframe, using researcher-developed interview questions.
- An attempt was made to identify positive attitudes and responses to changes initiated by Community College B to improve the student-affairs environment.
- Findings of our study may have significance to community colleges similar to the selected college in clientele, purpose, structure and services offered.

Limitations

- Our study was confined to examining two Florida 2-year public community colleges.
- Our study was confined to interviews using researcher-developed questions.
- Analysis of the data were confined to qualitative inspection.

Need for the Study

Little research has been done on the role student affairs role plays in the learning college or learning-centered environment and the role it plays in the context of student success. Further, there has been little focus on the need for equal commitment of the institution to all segments of the campus community as a critical factor in student success. Current state performance-based funding ties state support dollars for community colleges to college completers, therefore the ability to attract and retain students to goal completion and the attainment of learning gains become of prime concern to community colleges. This fact gives impetus to the need to identify the factors by which an institution can move toward learning-centeredness.

Traditionally, institutions of higher education have been strongly committed to academic integration as a vehicle for student success. However, the educational environment itself is often not recognized as an integral component of student retention and success. This is probably a major oversight, since Bean and Metzner (1985) said that "environmental support compensates for weak academic support, but academic support will not compensate for weak environmental support" (p. 492). Although the community college typically serves a commuter-student population, there appears to be no reason that students cannot develop an affiliation with the institution, especially if the institution works to foster a sense of community among its students and create a positive learning

environment for its students. Perhaps it is more difficult to achieve this connectedness in this context, but it is at the very heart of learning-centeredness. The learning-centered approach postulates that students will recognize that the institution "personally" shares their desire for academic success and goal attainment.

Assumptions

Our study made the following assumptions:

- The procedures used will achieve the purposes of this study
- Identifiable environmental changes took place at the focus institution that were designed to create a staying or nurturing environment.
- Responses at the study institution will be comparable to responses collected at Community College A—an institution that has been recognized with international Vanguard status for learning-centeredness by the League for Innovation in Community Colleges.
- Factors can be identified that have a relationship to the development of a learning-centered student environment.

Definition of Terms

- **Academic achievement** is the level at which a student performs in relation to the academic standards set by the institution.
- **Academic integration** refers to a student's ability to maintain adequate grades.
- **Campus environment** refers to the look, and/or feel of the physical surroundings, the attitude exhibited by its workers, as well the policies and procedures of the college or department.
- **Community college** refers to a 2-year public institution which offers programs and/or courses limited to the first 2 years of post-secondary education, including a university transfer program and at least one of the following areas: occupational education or continuing (noncredit) education.
- **Dynamic congruence** is organizational synergy which embraces and promotes the ongoing benefit of collaborative partnerships in developing and meeting its goals.
- **Enrollment management** refers to a formalized plan used to define marketing, recruitment, retention and student success procedures and processes.

- **Institutional commitment** refers to the extent that a college provides the full range of resources needed to college personnel to address student needs and the freedom to implement innovative programs that foster student success.
- **Learning centered** means fully embracing the principles of the learning college.
- **Learning college** describes a college that creates substantive change in individual learners, engages learners in the learning process as full partners, offers as many options for learning as possible, assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities, defines the role of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners and is able to document that improved and expanded learning has occurred.
- **Mission authenticity** describes an institution's actual demonstration by providing sufficient resources (personnel, funding, facilities, leadership, etc.); it is truly dedicated to actualizing its mission.
- **Nontraditional student** is the student who did not enter a postsecondary institution upon graduation from high school and who may have had a significant time lapse between high school graduation and enrollment in a postsecondary institution.
- **Persistence** refers to the decision that the student makes to continue enrollment and work towards his or her educational goal.
- **Social integration** refers to the affiliation of students to groups, activities and events outside the traditional classroom setting. This includes peer and institutional interactions including casual contact with faculty, staff, and administrators.
- **Traditional student** is one who just graduated from high school and immediately entered a postsecondary institution.
- **Welcome center** is a facility that houses all student-service offices. It is set up in an easy-to-navigate layout, with a relaxed welcoming atmosphere; it uses customer-service trained personnel, inviting décor, and accessibility features that encourage new and currently enrolled students to take advantage of the resources on a regular basis. This facility should not be confused with a student lounge or student union.

Chapter 1 showed the need to define the role of student affairs in the context of the learning-centered environment. It also presented the interrelated aspects of creating a learning-centered student environment from a student-affairs perspective. This included retention, student persistence, environmental issues, and policies and procedures. In

addition, a new model for defining student success and student affairs role in learning-centeredness at the community college was introduced. Chapter 2 reviews current literature on the topics identified above.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature on student persistence, campus environment/ecology, the learning college and learning-centeredness, student success, and the role of student affairs in the learning-centered movement. The newness of the role of student affairs in the learning-centered movement is evident by the dearth of current research in the area. Our study adds to this body of knowledge and present additional areas for further research.

Student Persistence

Success for community college students can be far different than for freshman university students. Likewise, the profile of community college students differs significantly from the profile of university freshmen. More than half of all students entering community colleges lack the basic skills required to do creditable work (McCabe, 1988). Tinto (1987) notes that students come to college with a specific set of attributes including family background, precollege schooling, and personal or individual attributes—any or all of which can have an impact on a student's individual success. Knowing this, and realizing the inability of an open-door institution to have any pre-enrollment effect on these incoming attributes, it is necessary for an institution to be prepared to provide an environment and level of services that benefit this diverse population. "As educators acquire a more sophisticated understanding of human environments, they will be better positioned to eliminate those features of institutions that

are needlessly stressful or inhibiting, and ultimately to create those features that will challenge students toward active learning, growth and development" (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 4). This literature review therefore focuses on two major topics germane to student success: (a) the environmental or campus ecology theory and its role in creating a learning-centered environment and (b) student retention /persistence theory.

The challenge is that 30% to 50% of all students enrolled in an institution of higher education eventually drop out (Astin, 1975; Cross, 1971; MacMillian & Kester, 1973; Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Numerous retention strategies attempt to identify the "high risk" student up front. The strategy of assessment and placement testing emphasizes prediction rather than prevention (Keim, 1981; Keyser, 1982; MacMillian & Kester, 1973). Others believe that efforts should focus on prevention and should be student-centered rather than institution-centered (Engleberg, 1980). Still others argue that strategies should aim to improve the institution's services (better advising and more full-time instructors) rather than placing the blame on ill-prepared students (Zwerling, 1980). Student success is often correlated with retention rates, as noted by Sydow and Sandel (1998), "An institution committed to student success must also be committed to student retention, for often the key to success for many students is mere persistence" (p. 635). Bedford and Durkee (1989) concluded that "institutions concerned with students' welfare and with the quality of their social and intellectual development retain students and attract students more likely to be retained" (p. 169) This thinking underscores the need for the holistic approach provided by a learning-centered environment in higher education.

The basis for Vincent Tinto's (1987) theoretical model of attrition is Durkheim's notion of suicide and social integration as described by Spady (1971). Tinto (1987,

1993) argues that the secret of retention is to develop communities committed to education rather than retention. This position supports O'Banion's (1999) philosophy of creating learning communities where faculty are facilitators for student learning (and one part of the learning community), and student affairs and other support services are another. Tinto (1987) discussed several major causes of student attrition including academic difficulty, problems in adjusting to college life, lack of clearly-defined goals, uncertainty about career aspirations, and unwillingness to make academic commitments. Special attention was paid to the relationship between persistence and experiences that tend to integrate the individual into the college community, especially the incongruence between what the individual needs and what the college provides. Student isolation also must be addressed. Tinto further believes that a common feature of effective retention programs is their emphasis on the "communal nature" of institutional life. Effective programs integrate individuals into the mainstream of the social and intellectual life of the institution and into the communities of people that make up that life. Moreover, various programs consciously reach out to make contact with students in order to establish personal bonds among students and among students, faculty, and staff members of the institution. Effective retention programs provide continuing assistance to students and act to ensure the integration of all individuals as equal and competent members of the institution.

Tinto (1987) further points out that frequent contact among faculty, staff, and students in a variety of settings outside the formal classroom is particularly important. Research on this is clear: "namely that the frequency and perceived worth of interaction with faculty outside the classroom is the single strongest predictor of student voluntary departure" (Tinto, 1987, p. 28). Additionally, after surveying 944 2- and 4-year public

and private colleges and universities, Roueche and Rouche (1993) found the caring attitude of faculty and staff to be the most important retention factor.

Grosset (1989), in reviewing a study by Chapman and Pascarella (1983), noted that 2-year college students had far less informal contact with faculty on academic and nonacademic matters and fewer informal conversations with peers than did students in other college settings. Grosset (1989) views the greater dropout rates associated with community colleges as a confirmation of the important influence that student integration has on persistence. If social integration of students is to be considered as a serious component of student success and retention, then the strategies behind this initiative must be explored and defined. A positive climate on a campus where students are encouraged to interact with the faculty/staff seems mandatory, but this also requires a climate of positive interaction among all the campus players from the top-level administration to the front line worker. "Regardless of how sophisticated and comprehensive various recruitment and retention strategies are, if the atmosphere of the institution is not a 'staying environment,' their impact will be in the long run minimal" (Noel & Levitz, 1985, p. 26). Students need to be acutely aware that the institution is seriously intent on seeing them successfully meet their goals. As O'Banion (1999) states,

Every employee is linked to learners in the exercise of his or her duties, although some activities such as accounting may be less directly related. The goal is to have every employee thinking about how his or her work facilitates the learning process. (p. 9)

The Learning College

Describing the traditional architecture of higher education, O'Banion (1999) states that one of the greatest weaknesses keeping the traditional educational system from becoming learning centered is the fact that it is role-bound.

In education we make the assumption that one human being, the teacher, can ensure that 30 very different human beings in one hour a day 3 days a week for 16 weeks can learn enough to become enlightened citizens, productive workers and joyful, lifelong learners. Then we assume that this one human being can repeat this miracle three more times in the same 16-week period for 90 additional individuals. We provide little comfort and support when teachers fail to live up to this role-bound myth. (p. 3)

Although the face of the community college has changed dramatically over the last few years, in many instances the internal culture has remained static. Whatever the stance, the economy, funding, demographic shifts, and technology are the driving forces behind the investigation of more productive ways to operate the community college of the 21st century. Reinventing colleges around a learning framework is critical to the continued success and viability of the community college and its mission.

Harvey-Smith (2003), in her paper *A Learning Framework for Transforming Learning Organizations: Proposing a new Learning College Principle*, adds a seventh learning principle to the six presented by O'Banion (1997).

The trend in postsecondary education to embrace more learning-centered approaches must involve the examination and reshaping of institutional cultures to truly transform. The shifts in instructional practice are clear and have been guided by the six learning college principles of (1) creating substantive change in learners, (2) engaging learners as full partners, (3) creating and offering a variety of learning options, (4) assisting learners in forming and participating in collaborative learning activities, (5) defining roles in response to the needs of learners, and (6) documenting improved and expanded learning. (p. 1)

Yet, shifts in practice within student affairs divisions are less clear, thus limiting our ability to document the impact the learning revolution is having on transforming student development practices. Consequently, it is critical for student affairs divisions to make more visible or to change current practices to support the 21st century Learning College.

A seventh learning college principle, accompanied by critical strategies, could form a framework for transforming learning organizations. This seventh learning college principle serves as a nexus from which the original six principles can be implemented: Create and nurture an organizational culture that is both open and responsive to change and learning. (Harvey-Smith, 2003)

She further states

By creating and nurturing an organizational culture that is both open and responsive to change and learning, an environment is formed to provide the pivotal foundation that supports the transformation of all learners within the culture. This new principal can be beneficial in a number of ways:

- An increase in open and diverse systems
- More willingness to innovate
- Bringing together of divergent groups as differences are recognized, appreciated and celebrated
- Higher levels of trust, collaboration, responsiveness, and inclusion
- Deeper and authentic communication. (Harvey-Smith, 2003, p. 2)

Just as this seventh principal provides us with the next step in the philosophical evolution of learning-centeredness, it also opens the door for student affairs to become a full partner in the institutional transformation process. O'Banion (1999) has stated that, "The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators in response to the needs of the learners. Everyone employed in the learning college is a learning facilitator, including categories formerly designated as administration and support staff" (p. 9).

The realization and acceptance of the idea that everyone can become a learning facilitator provides a much broader base for overall institutional shift to learning centeredness. That is why it is critical for all parties involved to truly understand the learning-centered concept, how it applies to them, and to accept their role in the institutional transformation process.

In her framework for change Harvey-Smith (2003) states,

Student affairs divisions can be instrumental in aiding learning organizations in the creation and nurturing of transformational cultures that are open and responsive to change and learning. Traditional goals of student affairs divisions have included the development of the whole person, the fostering of involvement in the community, cultural pluralism, civic responsibility, and international understanding. The roles of student affairs divisions have changed to respond to the needs of a changing environment and have evolved from that of disciplinarian

to environmental scanner, milieu manager, and quality assurance specialist, with each role focused on the effective integration of the goals of individual with institutional development. (p. 2)

Learning Environment

Since the community-college student is primarily a commuter student, it is incumbent upon the institution to provide opportunities for students to interact with faculty and staff in a more informal setting. More importantly, it is necessary for the institution to provide a physical space and environment where this contact is encouraged. Inherent in this interaction are the activities that occur in the student's world involving contact with student affairs offices and personnel. This learning-centered approach is the recognition of the importance of the quality, quantity, and type of environment in which these activities occur. All three send a strong message to the participants in terms of the perceived worth by the institution of the value of these interactions. Strange and Banning (2001) assert,

Although we often become insensitive or perhaps even immune to the components and effects of our environment, the experience of a typical day for faculty, administrators, and students alike on any campus will reveal the scope of its effects. The sidewalk that encourages us to walk around a building rather than across the rain-soaked muddy pathway to an office, classroom, or residence room; the characteristic styles, conversations and actions of colleagues, students and staff; the expectations, patterns and procedures we follow (or ignore) in the execution of our responsibilities and assignments; and finally, the distinctive values and impressions we seem to intuit from the very air we breathe in the setting that help us understand and communicate to others "what it's like to be here". These are all exemplars of the components of human environments that serve to prod, bend, and shape behaviors. (p. 4)

Strange and Banning define architectural or environmental probabilism, as the act of capturing the probabilistic relationship between physical environments and behaviors, or more descriptively as,

an attractive, warm and welcoming entrance to a campus building will increase the probability of it being entered more so than if it is cold and unwelcoming.

The welcoming entrance does not cause entry, but the probability of entry can be increased with proper design. An admissions office hidden on the second floor of a building, away from typical traffic flow, has less probability of being found and used than one located at the main entrance on the ground floor. (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 16)

The environment, "thus communicates, through a whole set of cues, the most appropriate choices to be made: the cues are meant to elicit appropriate emotions, interpretations, behaviors, and transactions by setting up the appropriate situations and contexts"

(Rapaport, 1982 pp. 80-81). The way an institution responds to environmental concerns or issues sends a very clear message to those involved in that environment. For instance,

if the campus decides to make a curb wheelchair accessible by molding some asphalt to the curb, instead of installing proper curb cuts, such an adaptation might be technically functional, but it may also encode messages of not caring enough to do it correctly, not valuing the user or just 'responding minimally to needs of the physically challenged. (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 16)

The research supporting the nonverbal communications link between the physical environment and behavior is well established. For example, it has been shown that the attractiveness of a room influences positive affect and the energy level of those working in the room (Maslow & Mintz, 1956). Low lighting, soft music, and comfortable seats encourage people to spend more time in restaurants and bars. This may indicate that when new structures are being built (or older ones renovated) for essential student affairs functions such as registration, advising, financial aid, and testing, the environment that these areas will create as part of the campus ecology should be considered a critical component in the amount of use they receive, the quality of the experience, and the role they play in student success and developing a sense of community.

Once a student is encouraged to enter by the design of the campus building, then an array of influences is both possible and probable. For example, the proxemics associated with seating arrangements in a lounge area in a student center can either promote or inhibit social interaction. The physical artifact messages of support or nonsupport can take many forms, signaling a sense of belonging, a

feeling of being welcomed, a sense of safety, and a sense of role, worth, and value. (Banning & Bartels, 1993, pp. 2-3)

Such messages enhance or detract from students' ability to cope with college stress.

In a recent effort to document the positive benefits of environmental change on learning the Westgate campus of Houston Community College Northwest asked the question, "Does the traditional classroom consisting of clean pastel colored walls and rows of chairs facing a lectern support learning and specifically student-centered learning?" The answer to this question as reported by Michael Ronan, in the League for Innovation in the Community Colleges' 2004 newsletter, *Transformational Learning Connections*, clearly shows the positive role environmental change has on learning. A traditional classroom had its carpet removed and replaced with tile as a cost saving measure. When used, faculty complained of increased noise, reflected glare from the new tile floor, and back pain after standing on the floor for 30 minutes. In order to address these complaints, the president of Northwest asked the faculty, "What does a classroom dedicated to student-centered learning require?" A committee was formed and a list made of requirements, mostly consisting of furniture and equipment. The committee, however, agreed that this alone would not meet their goals. It was decided to add art to the room. A proposal was solicited and accepted from a local artist, who was a former student, to help transform the room. According to Ronan,

The artist invoked colors and textures symbolic of earth and sea. An expanding and contracting ribbon of wood twists around the walls of the room like the track of a roller coaster, supported by painted structural beams reminiscent of classical Grecian columns. Copper tubing irregularly outlines the edge of the wooden ribbon. Underneath the wood and copper tubing the walls are textured, painted, and glazed in an uneven pewter color that seems to undulate like waves...a carpet picks up the colors on the walls. (Ronan, 2004, p. 2)

Ronan continues,

in a grade and retention comparison of all English and other disciplines taught in the same room for the year before and the year after the change (408 and 527 students, respectively),

- Overall grades were fairly consistent between the two years; and
- Retention increased after the change: 4.2% fewer student withdrawals
- In literature classes after the change, there were
 - 5% more As,
 - 4% more Bs and
 - 4% fewer withdrawals" (Ronan, 2004, pp. 2-3)

This research supports the premise that "classroom environment affects learning" as stated by Schneider (2002, p. 9). Vibrant colors of the walls or art can be a factor in stimulating the senses and fostering interaction among students and between students and faculty, and promoting student centered learning.

It should be noted, however, that the environment is not just physical space or surroundings. The human element involved must be addressed. Moos (1986) noted that, "the character of an environment is implicitly dependent on the typical characteristics of its members" (p. 286).

These human characteristics influence the degree to which people are attracted to, satisfied with, and retained by those environments. Thus, academic departments, depending on the nature of their work as reflected in the collective characteristics of present members, will attract, satisfy, and retain students and faculty of certain types. (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 35)

This review has focused on the inter-related topics of learning-centeredness, student success, student retention, the importance of environmental factors in becoming learning centered and learning opportunities that are presented both inside and outside the traditional classroom setting. These topics and others will be revisited in greater depth in Chapter 4.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 has shown that the interrelated components of a learning-centered environment include student retention, persistence, need for institutional support, and importance of environmental factors. It also provides us insights into the role of student affairs as an institutional partner or integrator in the creation of an institution's learning-centered environment. The methodology for this comparative case study will be explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter defines the research methodology used in this study. It identifies the purpose, problem investigated, and design used to gather the data.

The purpose of this research was to examine the phenomenon of student, faculty, staff/administrative perceptions of the link between learning-centered philosophy and environmental change within student affairs at community college B. This qualitative study used grounded theory while investigating the boundaries of this topic—learning-centeredness and environmental change—and its effect on student perceptions. The recent growth in the learning-centered movement within community colleges, and the lack of understanding of its holistic nature by community college professionals, has led to the need for this study to expand the body of knowledge concerning learning-centeredness and the effect of environmental factors on student's institutional perceptions.

Purpose of the Study

The following question framed the study: Did environmental changes affect student, faculty, staff and administrative perceptions of the institution of attendance/employment and thereby promote the "learning-centered" concept at a Florida community college? This broad question was refined and focused as data were collected, culminating in building theory regarding the learning-centered concept, student-institution interaction, and environmental changes.

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As Harvey-Smith began to redefine the role of the student affairs divisions as change agents in the broader context of learning-centeredness, this study explored a single institution's student affairs transformation. This transformation included not only human interactions but also the impact of physical environment, policies, and procedures on student perceptions, specifically when changes to the student affairs environment have been based on learning-centered theory.

Research Design

This study was conducted in two phases. In phase one, students, faculty, staff, and administrators who used the student affairs services/offices (both prior to substantive environmental changes being made and after said changes were made) at Community College B were interviewed individually. In phase two, students, faculty, staff, and administrators who used these services/offices at Community College A were interviewed. In both phases the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Both A and B community colleges are multi-campus institutions located in the same geographic region. Campuses at both institutions were selected based on similarities in size and student enrollment. Target numbers for interviewees at each institution were 10 students, 5 faculty/staff, and 2 administrators.

Each of the campuses at Community College B completed, or was nearing completion, of major learning-centered changes in the student affairs areas, both procedurally and environmentally. In contrast, Community College A began a comprehensive transformation toward a learning-centered environment in 1995 and is now recognized as one of 12 international Vanguard Learning Colleges by the League for Innovation in the Community College. The data from community college A was used to

validate the research design by providing additional data sources that assisted in determining replication of phenomena within a known learning-centered setting.

Both interview phases used researcher-created questions. The questions were submitted for review to an expert panel whose members had nationally recognized backgrounds in student affairs and learning-centered education (Appendix A). The instruments were then modified based on their feedback.

Rationale for the Method

Case study methodologies were deemed most appropriate for this study because, according to Yin, case studies should be used, "to explain complex causal links in real-life interventions" (Yin, 1994, p. 22). Researcher Yin further defined the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984). The quintessential characteristic of case studies is that they strive toward a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation. The unit of analysis is a critical factor in the case study. It is typically a system of action rather than an individual or group of individuals. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined. Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristics that case studies possess (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Case study is known as triangulated research strategy. "The need for triangulation arises

from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In case studies this can be done using multiple sources of data" (Yin, 1984, p. 24).

Procedures

The personal interview technique was used to collect data relating to the questions offered in the statement of purpose section. Additionally, researcher-prepared student, faculty, staff, and administrator interview sessions were held using a sample of convenience. Areas of exploration included

- Student, faculty, staff and administrative perceptions of the college's effort to create a student friendly student affairs environment
- Actual student use of new facilities. Ease of access, desire to return
- Perceived impact (students, faculty, staff and administration self-assessment) of student affairs in terms of
 - Their regard/respect for the institution overall
 - Their desire to persist (retention)
 - Their ability to achieve academically
 - Their ability to make new friends and socially integrate

Sampling Plan

The researcher used a sample of convenience for interviews; consideration was given to age, gender and ethnicity. Students, faculty, staff, and administrators were interviewed as they came in to use or visit the student services facilities at both institutions.

Data Collection

The researcher arranged for interviews to take place on two target campuses at both institutions. Time was set to work around student class schedules as much as possible to insure the greatest number of participants. Students, faculty, staff, and administrators were selected using a sample of convenience for each of the two campuses at both institutions.

Data Analysis: Grounded Theory

Characteristics of a Grounded Theory

Fit. The theory must fit the data if it is to be useful. The theory must correspond closely to the data, not to our personal wishes, biases, values, or expectations.

Understanding. The theory should be clearly stated and readily understandable to people working in the substantive area, even to nonresearchers. Practitioners cannot use a theory that they do not understand.

One of the challenges with learning-centered theory is developing an understanding as to what it is and how it relates to individuals as well as departments. The latter was explained by O'Banion (1999) in terms of the classroom and the teacher; however, little has been done to explain how it can be implemented in other areas. This study shed light on how learning-centeredness can be applied to divisions of Student Affairs.

Generality. The scope of the theory and its conceptual level should not be so specific that the theory only applies to one small set of people or to only one specific situation. Conceptualize concepts in the theory at a level abstract enough to move beyond the specifics in the original research study.

This study approached learning-centeredness in a broad context: from physical environmental changes to personnel training in technology and customer service, to student access to technology and changes to college policy and procedures.

Control. The substantive theory must enable the person who uses it to have enough control in everyday situations to make its application worth trying. It is a good idea to identify controllable variables and build them into your grounded theory.

Since the scope of this study was holistic in nature, the many components that made up the whole could be broken out as separate initiatives and therefore could be

easily replicated by practitioners, either one at a time or in groups, as resources become available. In any case, this implementation constituted a move on the part of the institution toward a learning-centered environment.

The development of a grounded theory is a never-ending process. . . . A grounded theory should be further elaborated and modified in future research studies . . . the person who applies the theory becomes, in effect, a generator of theory. (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, pp. 332-333).

Individual interviews were conducted and tape-recorded. A verbatim transcript of each interview was typed. During the interview, the researcher restated and summarized each subject's response to the questions to insure the subjects understanding of the interview questions.

Coding

The coding process is a multi-step analytical tool that allows the researcher to get at the true essence of the data collected. By employing this process, the study of the target phenomenon was enhanced and refined to the point that the central idea of the developing theory was revealed. The following steps were employed in this coding process.

Open coding. Open coding involves examining the data, and naming and categorizing discrete elements in the data. This first phase was done using a color-coding system for the initial categorizing.

Axial coding. The researcher developed the concepts into categories and organized the categories. The researcher reviewed these categories to see what elements/themes were mentioned by the participants frequently (what themes appeared across the interviews). The researcher looked for possible relationships among the

categories in the data. A goal was to show how the phenomenon operates (i.e., how the participants perceptions of Student Affairs relates to the learning-centered concept).

Selective coding. Selective coding is data analysis that puts the finishing touches on the grounded theory for the current research study. This is where the grounded theorist looks for the story line of the theory (the main idea) by reflecting on the data and the results that were produced during the open coding and axial coding. The researcher will usually need to continue to analyze the data, but with more focus on the central idea of the developing theory—this is where the story is written to explain the grounded theory.

Theoretical Saturation

"The grounded theorist stops when no new information or concepts are emerging from the data and when the grounded theory has been thoroughly validated with the collected data" (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 336). While the main focus concentrated on student perceptions, the information gathered from faculty, staff, and administrators provided additional perspectives in addition to the student's perceptions and proved to be a valuable area for future research. Via-Voice, a voice-to-text software, was used in the transcription of the interviews.

Summary

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. This researcher identified the open-ended interview format as the best way to discover the interviewees opinions on and perceptions of events and facts concerning institutional changes within the student affairs areas of their respective institutions. Chapter 3 defined the research design and methodology used in data collection. Chapter 4 provides research results and emerging themes within the context of student affairs role in the learning college/learning-centered environment.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study was prompted by the need to understand the role of student affairs within the context of a learning-centered environment, and to determine if purposeful learning-centered changes within student affairs would be perceived as such by the colleges students, faculty, and staff. The current study also investigated whether student affairs could act as an institutional integrator for the creation of a collegewide learning-centered environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine the phenomenon of student, faculty, staff and administrative perceptions of the link between learning-centered philosophy and environmental change within student affairs at a Florida community college. Essentially, the key research question that frames the study is this: Did intentional environmental change at a Florida community college affect student, faculty, staff and administrative perceptions regarding the implementation of a learning-centered paradigm?

Overview of Methodology

The qualitative case study was the research method of choice for this study. The case study was selected because it is an appropriate vehicle "to explain complex causal links in real-life interventions" (Yin, 1994). Multiple sources of data were collected from students, faculty, staff, and administrators on two campuses at both the institution of interest and at a known learning-centered institution in the same geographic region.

Collecting multiple sources of data is a triangulation strategy that increases the validity of the research findings.

The personal interview technique was utilized to collect data. Individual interviews were conducted and tape-recorded at both Community College A (a Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness as recognized by the League for Innovation in the Community College) and Community College B (the institution of interest in this study). Researcher-developed interview questions were used with subjects to explore their perceptions of learning-centeredness. Questions were grouped into five major categories designed to collect data about the following aspects of each institution: college operations, shared governance (used with faculty/staff/administrators only), impressions of staff, observed changes, and the impact of student services on educational outcomes.

A verbatim transcript of each interview was then produced. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were performed on the interview transcripts to the point of theoretical saturation. This coding provided the data used in the development of a grounded theory relating to learning-centered environmental change and the perceptions of students, faculty, staff, and administrators at a Florida community college.

Presentation of Data

Data from this study are divided into two major parts. First, the data collected at Community College A are presented and discussed. Community College A is a Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness as recognized by the League for Innovation in the Community College. Discussion of the data centers on four major areas:

- Perceptions of faculty/staff/administrators
- Perceptions of students
- Macro themes that emerged from the responses of the participants

- Key thematic antecedents that provide a more detailed understanding of the participant's perceptions.

Next, the data collected at Community College B are presented. This is the institution of interest that is in the intermediate stages of implementing learning-centered principles within the division of student affairs. The same four categories are used to organize the data: perceptions of faculty/staff/administrators, perceptions of students, macro themes, and key thematic antecedents.

The analysis of faculty/staff/administrator perceptions is organized around interview questions that focus on five key components of learning-centered student affairs practice. These components and their corresponding interview questionnaire numbers are

- College operations (questions 4 through 10)
- Shared governance (question 11)
- Impressions of staff (questions 12 through 15)
- Observed environmental changes (question 16)
- Impact of student services on educational outcomes (questions 17 through 19).

The complete survey instrument for faculty/staff/administrators appears in Appendix B.

The analysis of student perceptions is organized around the same key components of learning-centered student affairs practice, with the exception of the shared governance component (Appendix C). Thus, the key components and corresponding interview questionnaire numbers for student perceptions are

- College operations (questions 16 through 22)
- Impressions of staff (questions 23 through 26)
- Observed environmental changes (question 27)
- Impact of student services on educational outcomes (questions 28 through 30).

Description of Sample

The researcher used a sample of convenience for interviews at both Community College A and Community College B. Students, faculty, staff and administrators were

interviewed as they used or visited the student services facilities at both institutions. The actual sample obtained at Community College A was 4 faculty/staff/administrators and 10 students. At Community College B, the sample consisted of 3 faculty/staff/administrators and 10 students. The average number of years that the faculty/staff/administrators had been employed at Community College A was 10.2 years. Surprisingly, the average number of years that the faculty staff administrators had been employed at Community College B was also exactly 10.2 years.

Table 4-1 provides an overview of the demographic for the student sample at Community College A. When the total n for the sample is more than 10, this indicates questions where the students gave more than one answer. For example, one student reported the level of his parents' education for both his biological parents and his stepparents. Some students only reported educational levels for one or no parents.

Table 4-2 provides an overview of the demographic for the student sample at Community College B. When the total n for the sample is more than 10, this indicates questions where the students gave more than one answer.

Perceptions at Community College A

The Perceptions of Faculty/Staff/Administrators

College operations

This component of learning-centered student affairs is assessed through questions relating to college operations and requirements in the areas of student assessment, placement, academic advising, orientation, registration, academic alert systems, and class attendance. At Community College A, all of the faculty/staff/administrators knew whether or not the college had requirements in place to address these areas and were able to describe the details of the policies.

Table 4-1. Community College A—Student sample demographics

						<i>n</i>
Age	18-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36+	
	6 (60%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	10
Sex	F	M				
	3 (30%)	7 (70%)				10
Ethnicity	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	White	
	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)	10
FTIC	N	Y				
	4 (40%)	6 (60%)				10
Financial aid	N	Y				
	5 (50%)	5 (50%)				10
Status	F/T	P/T				
	9 (90%)	1 (10%)				10
Semester hours	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41+	
	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	10
Goal	AA	AS	PSAV	Other		
	7 (70%)	2 (20%)		1 (10%)		10
Employed	N	Y				
	1 (10%)	9 (90%)				10
Family income	< 30K	30-60K	61-100K	>100K	Don't Know	
	2 (20%)	5 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	10
First generation	N	Y				
	7 (70%)	3 (30%)				10
Parents' education	<H.S.	H.S. grad	Some coll.	BA/BS	MA/MS	
	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	6 (40%)	2 (13%)	15
First choice	N	Y				
	5 (50%)	5 (50%)				10
Choice factor	Cost	Location	Convenience	Other	All	
	3 (21%)	3 (21%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	5 (36%)	14

Table 4-2 Community College B—Student sample demographics

						<i>n</i>
Age	18-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36+	
	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10
Sex	F	M				
	6 (60%)	4 (40%)				10
Ethnicity	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	White	
	0 (0%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	5 (50%)	10
FTIC	N	Y				
	6 (60%)	5 (50%)				10
Financial Aid	N	Y				
	5 (50%)	5 (50%)				10
Status	F/T	P/T				
	6 (60%)	4 (40%)				10
Semester Hours	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41+	
	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	10
Goal	AA	AS	PSAV	Other		
	8 (73%)	2 (18%)		1 (9%)		11
Employed	N	Y				
	2 (20%)	8 (80%)				10
Family Income	< 30K	30-60K	61-100K	>100K	Don't Know	
	5 (50%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	10
First Generation	N	Y				
	9 (90%)	1 (10%)				10
Parents' Education	< H.S.	H.S. grad	Some coll.	BA/BS	MA/MS	
	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	5 (31%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	16
First Choice	N	Y				
	6 (60%)	4 (40%)				10
Choice Factor	Cost	Location	Convenience	Other	All	
	2 (15%)	5 (38%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)	2 (15%)	13

Perceptions about these policies ranged from the highly positive to ambivalence. None of the faculty/staff/administrators had negative feelings about any of the specific requirements or general college operations. The majority felt that the requirements helped students take responsibility for their actions and college careers. The majority also felt that the requirements contributed to student learning and success. For example, one administrator had the following thoughts about mandatory orientation for new students, "I think it works great! We at least know that we attempted to give the student the basic information for them to be successful and connected them with the tools and the resources of the college."

This administrator also connected the requirement for registration prior to the first day of classes with increased time-on-task and student learning. In fact, his community college even had a name for this process. He commented, "The best thing about the Start Right Initiative is that we have guaranteed to our faculty that our students will be ready to learn on the first day, and that the first day, the first minute of every class are important." He continued by saying, "So the first class is not just a day to hand out your syllabus and say goodbye. It's a time to teach, because you're going to have . . . 95% of your students are going to be there, ready to learn."

When asked a follow-up question about whether this policy had a negative impact on student enrollment, he acknowledged that enrollment had dipped slightly since the implementation of this policy. However, he again emphasized that the policy was helpful to the students and that it was the "right" thing to do. His exact words were, "all in all, I think it's founded in a really good learning-centered theoretical foundation, so we know it's right, and that's something that . . . it might affect the bottom line, but we know that it's helpful to the students."

A faculty member at Community College A was also very knowledgeable about the details of college policies and initiatives. She expressed a remarkably similar desire to do the "right" thing for students and was even able to provide an institutional reference, or standard, for this behavior. She expressed the following thoughts with regard to a question about mandatory placements,

[Community College A] has Seven Strategic Initiatives—our second or third initiative is to serve students right, and so that is where the underprepared program comes in, and the student success program comes in, because we are dealing with . . . about 90% of our population is in some form of remediation. So, if you have that large a population that needs help in being prepared so they can be successful in college, you bet we better have it, and we better have a good program.

She continued this theme of doing the "right" thing for students and expanded it by introducing the idea of providing good customer service that truly meets the needs of students—even if it is inconvenient for the institution. In response to the question about mandatory orientation she commented,

Should we have orientation that meets the needs of our population? Yes. If I should have a lot of students that work until 6:00 [p.m. then] I need an orientation at night for that student that is coming. Do I have students that can't get off at all during the week, so I need a Saturday morning orientation? Absolutely. Let's find out what the student needs and orient them to who we are. Absolutely!

These themes of customer service and student success were also reinforced by another administrator at Community College A. When discussing required student assessment programs, she pointed out that Community College A was going beyond the basic assessment of math, reading, and writing skills. Specific vocational and technical programs were also conducting assessments of new students. She explained,

Recently we started administering the nursing entrance test to students prior to coming in to the nursing program, and if they have a 55 or below score on the reading level, we have developed a for-credit reading course specifically for nursing and allied health students.

She continued by saying,

I think it's been very advantageous for the student. . . . we want everyone to succeed and, certainly, diagnostically, if we can determine where someone is and help them to get to that point so that they can be successful, then it's extremely important.

This administrator did not have the same strong feelings about the attendance policy at Community College A. When asked about her perception of the institution's attendance policy she said, "I am ambivalent on that one." She went on to explain, "We don't have a strong classroom attendance policy at the college. The policy is the faculty member can determine the attendance policy and print it in the syllabus, and that is the attendance policy for that class." She did acknowledge an upside to the policy later in her response. She concluded by saying,

There's also some benefit to having it like we have it. Each faculty now has it within their jurisdiction to do and to manage, and as long as the college backs that, which they do, I think it works well. It gives the student . . . the adult student the opportunity to have some responsibility for themselves.

Shared governance

At this institution, all of the faculty/staff/administrators affirmed that faculty and staff who are assigned responsibility for implementing student success policies do participate in developing and approving those policies. One faculty member commented, "As far as I know, we have a committee for everything, and you have a voice in just about everything that I can think of that you want to have a voice in. [There is] not too much top-down here, it is pretty much spread out to the faculty."

An administrator articulated the situation explicitly, noting, "We have a shared governance model at Community College A, and every single thing we discuss has to be discussed within all the different representative bodies." This administrator also had positive feelings about shared governance, but noted that decision-making does take longer with this process. He explained his feelings by saying,

It definitely tries people who want to make a decision and move on; but, ultimately, it does bring the community together. I think people who participate in the shared governance model really feel that they have more of a say in what goes on here at the college and more of a commitment to the work here.

One female student development staff member echoed this sentiment. She noted,

I can tell you, as a person working in student services and working with student success, that I have had the opportunity to be on committees where we are working on implementing new policies and procedures that help students become more successful.

She enthusiastically continued by saying,

I think it's great! I think it's great for a person that is going to be on that committee to kind of have both perspectives: the faculty perspective and the administrative perspective, and I think that's one of the things that I like about what I do!

Impressions of staff

This series of questions asked subjects to provide their impressions of the staff in the key student service areas of admissions, registration, advising, and career services. Not surprisingly, all of the faculty/staff/administrators interviewed expressed positive feelings about their colleagues. Most emphasized that the staff in these areas were effective, helpful and friendly. The major reasons given for their positive perceptions included increased training, a recent redesign of student services, an improved utilization of technology, and teamwork (among students services staff and between the academic and student development sides of the institution).

One administrator summed-up many of these themes in the following quote,

Last year we redesigned student services.... So, the staff that sees students on the front end, accepting applications, is a hybrid of highly trained staff who know admissions, records, financial aid, and advising. . . . They've been in existence for a year now and we've seen really good things happening in that area.

Later he said, "I would say that the service level and commitment to students is excellent." He also noted, "I find that they're helpful. Even if they don't know me or haven't seen me, they tend to be very helpful."

These themes of redesigned student services and increased training were also expressed by a faculty member who said,

This model that we have now adopted is extremely . . . very, very good. . . . To get all of the staff on the same page . . . there was an extensive training process that was 3 or 4 days in length, I think, that worked with the whole admissions area. So I think we are seeing very positive pieces from that.

She also noted that customer service and the use of technology had improved. She commented,

Again, due to this whole change in the admissions and registration area we've seen a lot of improvement. Registration is faster for the students, it's friendlier, the cyber suite and the on-line registration. . . . They are using the LifeMap concept for advising.

One faculty member described how she contributed to the mission of student services by requiring her students to visit the career center. She explained, "I require them to do an interview speech, so they go over to the career center and get acquainted right off the bat with the career center over there, and the people that run that are just excellent." This participant was quite enthusiastic about the quality of staff in the career center. She concluded her response by saying, "So, if you are undecided, you are not quite sure what to do, it's your first or second semester, head over to the career center. Those people are great!" Another faculty member said, "I think we've got a good career service center on each campus . . . someone over there will be helpful to you—plus the fact that it's a requirement to actually go to the career service area for many courses."

The theme of teamwork was also expressed by a student development staff member who had the following response concerning registration,

like I said, we all work together. When registration comes along, even though there are certain people that are responsible for registration, student development goes out there and helps. We all help each other out, it's just like one team of people helping out with the registration process."

Observed changes

At Community College A, the Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness, faculty/staff/administrators were able to describe numerous, major changes within the student affairs environment. Specifically, they cited the redesign of student services for increased efficiency and customer service; an increase in the collaboration between faculty and student development staff; increased training and the development of a shared culture; new and revised policies, requirements, and deadlines that were more learning-centered and less enrollment-driven; and the implementation of a "learning support system" called *LifeMap* that simultaneously guides students through their college experience while teaching them planning skills. There was also an element of enthusiasm and pride that pervaded their comments as they talked about all of the changes that had been accomplished.

The following quotes from a student development staff member illustrate a number of these themes; specifically, the focus on increased efficiency and customer service, the large number of changes that have occurred, and the enthusiasm of the employees. She commented,

The largest change that I've seen would be Admissions, the Answer Center, the redesign. . . . So it's kind of like changing them [the students] from going to ten thousand stops to going to a place where the majority of their questions could be answered. They don't have to wait in line.

Later she practically bubbled, "there's just been a lot of changes; but, I mean, it's been great!" A female administrator concurred with her assessment about the quantity of change. When asked about observed changes, her first words were, "There have been a ton!" And another administrator summed-up his perceptions about the question by saying, "Big changes. This is not a place that slows down. . . . But it's been a fun place

to be for the last five years." A faculty member also confirmed the observation about the redesign of student services. She commented, "It used to be that you would go upstairs and people would be everywhere, there would be lines everywhere, and I don't seem to see that. That doesn't look as chaotic."

With respect to greater collaboration between faculty and student development staff, one subject reported, "There is a greater linkage between academic services and student services. . . . It's seen as a collective group. And a lot of that has come about certainly from our change under the learning-centered initiative." She continued by saying, "And so one of the things probably that has helped to make that change is that, with every one of those governance councils, there are representatives from academic and student services areas." As she continued to elaborate on this point, the theme of developing a shared culture emerged. She noted,

Another major change, when you look at faculty and the academic side is our Teaching and Learning Academy. . . . They [the faculty] have become much more acculturated to the community college system and to Community College A. . . . We've reached, I think, almost a critical mass. They really become . . . they feel a part of the college.

Interestingly, this intentional effort to develop and grow a shared culture even extended to adjunct faculty members. The subject noted, "There's a lot of attention given to acculturating the adjuncts, incorporating them more into the college life as much as they can."

A male administrator also spoke about the investment in training that the institution has made. He said, "One of the other things we did with that is provide a very high level of training for all of these folks [student development staff], and we continue to do that. We did person-centered training, customer service training, we had a lot of stuff on communication." He concluded by saying this about the culture of the

college, "I think our staff feels supported and feels like there's a lot of things out there for them to help them do their job."

On the issue of deadlines and requirements, one respondent was very articulate about the link between these policies and student success, even at the expense of enrollment for the college. He stated,

The application deadline, the orientation deadline, the financial aid deadline, those types of things have been major changes for Community College A. . . . We have, in the last 5 years, not become enrollment driven, partly because we have plenty of enrollment, but partly because we see that, in order to enhance the leaning of our students, they need to be doing things on time.

This subject also described the rollout of a learning support system for students. He continued his response by saying, "Within the last 5 years we implemented LifeMap, which is our learning support system for students where they learn how to plan, because planning is important. And that having that plan and accessing that plan and exercising that plan will help them be successful in the future."

Impact of student services on educational outcomes

On the series of questions related to the perceived impact of student services on educational outcomes, the faculty/staff/administrators at Community College A felt strongly that high quality student services does positively affect learning outcomes--not just academic learning outcomes, but also outcomes in other college student development domains. Another theme that emerged was that faculty must be supportive of student services and treated as an equal partner if the institution is to truly succeed in helping students achieve their full potential. The need to keep a customer service mindset was also expressed at this institution. Finally, all of the subjects agreed that the physical environment or facilities must be welcoming and inviting.

One respondent had this to say about the impact of student services, "Absolutely, I think the changes that we've made in student services affect learning outcomes for students. Typically, students remember sometimes a lot more of what happened outside of the classroom than what happened in the classroom." Another respondent said,

I think it does [impact learning outcomes]. If we provide quality services for our students not only educationally, but socially and personally by providing those services of leadership, learning how to network with people, [and] learning how to speak with people . . . it could have a link to educational outcomes.

A third subject made the connection with retention. She said, "Absolutely. If you don't have a strong student services side and get [the students] engaged in the educational system, they're not going to hang around."

The linkage between faculty and student development was a major issue for one faculty member. She commented, "It is absolutely very, very essential that we have good direction up front and that the faculty be in support of that so that the faculty are helping with what's going on and that we are both helping one another." She continued by saying, "I'm not totally sure that those people [in student development] understand how important . . . that I, as part of this community, see them as being that important. . . . Because I think in the college environment, you hear faculty, faculty, faculty." She concluded her remarks by noting, "I think we need to just be continually looking at both sides of the house."

On the topic of the physical facilities, a faculty member commented on the themes of customer service and creating a welcoming environment. She stated,

I came with the head-set that said if you are not good to your customer at the front door, they are not coming back. You are going to get one shot at it. When a student comes in the classroom, I feel the student needs to feel welcomed, the environment needs to be there. And if students come into an area in the cafeteria or the career center or registration or financial aid, and that environment is one that is not open and welcoming to them, then what are we doing here?

Another respondent reiterated these ideas. She said,

If you are teaching in an environment which isn't good for the students . . . let's say the lighting is not correct, the a/c is not working well and you have fans blowing, then it's not going to provide an environment that is going to be conducive to learning. So I think that the atmosphere, the environment around them, you know, how things are set up in an office makes a big difference in how students learn.

An administrator had a similar take on the situation. He said, "I think, you know, furnishing needs to be more comfortable, environments need to be less institutional and more welcoming." He continued by talking about major modifications to the physical environment that transformed the way staff interacted with students. He said,

But there's a lot of changes we've made. We've taken down walls. We've removed all the counters because any time you put a barrier between you and the student you are talking to, that's huge—like a counter—it makes it seem very transactional and not personal. So we've demolished a lot of that.

Later he returned to this idea of the personal versus the transactional. He commented,

With some of the new advances we have done, both in technology and in space, we can really spend more time with them [the students] . . . when we were seeing everyone we couldn't spend enough time with people who really needed us. So people who were just interested in transactional stuff had to come in and had to see someone. Well, now they don't have to. We can really spend time with people who need help assessing and working toward their goals.

The Perceptions of Students

College operations

On the student interview questionnaires, there were seven questions that assessed student perceptions about college requirements and policies in seven key areas of student affairs practice. These areas are student assessment, placement, academic advising, orientation, registration, academic early alert systems, and attendance.

Because of the volume of data collected, each area will be treated individually. Then a summary of the observations relating to college operations will be provided.

On the topic of required assessment testing, all of the students at Community College A knew that the college had a required student assessment program designed to identify specific areas in need of remediation. Of the 10 students surveyed, the overwhelming majority (9 of 10) reported positive perceptions regarding this area of practice. One student said, "I realize now that I would have needed this assessment so as to not make myself overwhelmed with a course I wasn't prepared for. So I am definitely in agreement with the college requirement." Another student supported this view. He said, "I think it's good because I personally have seen people in other community colleges that weren't assessed as well as they are here, and go on to college-level courses, and they are just not prepared at all. I definitely think it should be required." A female student seemed to understand that the requirement was designed to help students. She commented, "It's basically for the student's convenience so that they don't fail the class, or they are just sitting there and they are bored out of their minds, so it is just basically to help the students." Only one student was opposed to the requirement. She had strong feelings about this issue. She said, "I just thought it was ridiculous." She discussed how students were not able to use calculators for the math portion [of the placement test], even though they were allowed to use them in high school. She felt this created an inaccurate placement for her. She was obviously frustrated as she concluded her comments with this statement, "I thought the whole CPT was just . . . there is no point."

With regard to mandatory placement that is based on assessment testing, all of the students at Community College A knew that mandatory placement would occur as a

result of the scores they received on their assessment tests. On this topic, feelings were more mixed. Half of the students (5 of 10) expressed positive feelings about the requirement. Two students were ambivalent or gave statements that contradicted themselves. Three students were opposed to the requirement. The following quotes illustrate each of these viewpoints. On the positive side, one student said,

I have no problem with it. I understand that it is really meant for the benefit of the student. I believe that it is still important for students to be at college level if they do want to be successful and get the most out of their classes and what they are doing here.

Another student said, "I think it places everybody better and it gives them the best education possible." Ambivalence was expressed by one student who commented, "I kind of wish they were college-level, but what can you do?" On the negative side, a sophomore student summed up his feelings like this, "I have never had to do that, but I have seen people that have had to do that and I think that it is not fair." Another student said,

It's just that taking those mandatory classes puts you behind. It's like you want to hurry up, get somewhere else, you want to get your AA, but you have to start from the bottom knowing you are repeating all those requirements that you did in high school.

On the issue of academic advising, 7 of 10 students correctly knew the college policy that academic advising was not required every term for all students. Two students did not directly respond to the question, and one student was not sure if it was required or not. The subjects at this community college were split about whether this should be a requirement. Several thought that students should take responsibility for their own academic planning. However, about half thought that it should be required and acknowledged that it was a beneficial service that helps students. On the negative side, one student said, "I think being in college, you should be responsible and know

what you are trying to achieve. . . . I don't think anyone should be required to see an advisor." Another student commented, "I know that when I went in to the community college I was pretty much planned out every semester, and if people don't do that then they are just unprepared and maybe they shouldn't be college students." Other students had a different opinion that emphasized the helping factor. A freshman male stated,

I feel it should be a requirement . . . because a lot of students don't even have a clue what they want to do with their life. I think it might help them decide what they want to do with their life, if they were required to meet with an advisor.

Another student agreed saying, "I think it should be required. You should have to meet with an academic advisor every term if possible, to see what your status is and whether you are headed to your goals."

With regard to required orientation for new students, all 10 students at Community College A knew that it was a requirement, and they described this practice with words such as helpful, beneficial, good, and worth it. One subject said, "I think it's good. It is definitely worth it to have orientation." Another said, "I think it's definitely important for a student to get to know their environment, feel comfortable with it." A third student commented, "I think it's good. I found it helpful." A freshman made the connection with enhanced learning and planning. She stated, "I think it's good. Just sitting through the orientation—it's a great presentation where you get to learn about the college and how to set-up your goals and how to choose your courses."

In terms of the requirement for students to register before the first day of classes, 9 out of 10 students at the Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness knew that the college had a requirement for students to register before the first day of classes. There was unanimous agreement that this was a positive student affairs practice. One student also connected this policy with increased learning. He commented,

I think it really works out to the benefit of the teacher and the students, for the fact that the teacher doesn't have to give orientation at the beginning of the class to new students coming in, and that takes advantage of the time that you have in class.

Another subject returned to the theme of student responsibility. He noted,

It's a pretty good policy. First of all, the teachers are a little more prepared when they come in; they know how many people they have. Second of all, if somebody is going to be that nonchalant about registering for classes, again, they probably shouldn't be a college student. They are not prepared to be in a college atmosphere.

The perceptions of students at Community College A regarding the institution's academic early alert system were somewhat mixed. Sixty percent of the respondents thought that the college did not have an academic early alert system; however, most of those students reported that faculty would let them know if they were doing poorly. Only one student (10% of the sample) said that the college did have an academic early alert system. That student also knew that "the system" functioned by having faculty contact students who were doing poorly. Two students were unsure if the college had a system. However, they, too, knew that early academic warnings were a practice that faculty regularly engaged in. It was interesting to note that many of these students seemed to separate "the college" from "the faculty" in terms of their thinking about this question.

Clearly, two divergent themes were evident in the students' responses. One was that the college should have such a system. The other was that students should take responsibility for knowing their grades at all times. For example, one student said, "I think it would be helpful to the students . . . they should do everything possible to let the students know [about their grades]." Another student agreed saying, "I don't think it's required, but I think it should be required to let the students know how they are doing

because I figure they should know by the withdrawal deadline." This is in contrast to three students who made the case for student responsibility. One said, "That should be the responsibility of the student, to know where you are." Another said, "What I kind of liked about the idea of the student keeping the records is that it puts the responsibility on the student, and it really should be the student's burden to worry about their grades." The third student was very straightforward. He stated, "They shouldn't be babies. It's college. It's your life, it's your money, it's your time. Obviously, you should take a little more interest in what you are doing. They shouldn't have to have a college-wide program that has to do that."

Finally, on the topic of required class attendance, a large majority (80%) of the students at this institution knew that attendance was required. Most also knew that different departments and faculty members had considerable latitude to establish the exact number of days that could be missed, as well as the consequences for missing classes. Support for the policy was divided almost equally. Six students agreed with the policy. Three opposed it and one made statements that were both in support and against the policy. In one instance, a student noted, "It really depends on the teacher, whether the teacher chooses to enforce it or not. Every department does have certain guidelines on attendance." This student went on to say, "So it seems to me that it is for the benefit of the student that they have those limited days that they can have off." Another student hinted that there was an impact on student learning. He said, "I think it's an overall better experience whenever the students make it to class, at least on a regular basis." On the other side of the issue, student opinions were stronger. One subject stated, "I don't like it! You should not be penalized for not being in class, because I mean, it is college after all. We are adults here." Another student commented,

I think it's ridiculous because we all have families, we all have kids, we have different things, we all have life, and like, we can't miss more than three days? It's ridiculous. I am paying money, I should be required [allowed] to miss as many as I want. Hey, if money goes down the drain, it's my fault. So every time I get sick, I go to class and it doesn't work out because I'm not focused.

Overall, most of the students who were interviewed knew the institution's policies and requirements in the key areas of student affairs practice. The majority of students had positive perceptions of the institution's operating procedures in these areas and felt that the policies, procedures, and requirements were helpful and beneficial in terms of promoting student success and increased student learning. Opposition to the institution's operating procedures, policies, and requirements for the key areas of student affairs practice were expressed by a minority of the subjects in this study. The central theme that was expressed by these students was the belief that they, as college students, should be responsible for their actions, for their college experience, for their learning, and, ultimately, for their own success or failure with the college experience.

Impressions of staff

Four questions on the student interview questionnaire dealt with student perceptions of various student services staff. Specifically, the questionnaire solicited student perceptions about staff in admissions, registration, advisement and career services. At Community College A, the student perceptions of staff in all four areas were overwhelmingly positive. There was only one, slightly negative statement among the 40 responses collected from students (10 students, each answering four questions). Subjects described the student services staff with adjectives such as helpful, friendly, nice, kind, generous, and caring. While virtually all of the students in this sample had interacted with staff from admissions, registration, and advising, only half had visited the career services office and interacted with career services staff.

What follows are some typical responses from the sample of students at Community College A. With regard to admissions, one student said, "For me personally, when I have dealt with them they have always been extremely friendly and helpful. For the most part, they seem to be willing to always go the extra mile if I have ever needed any help." Another student, commenting about advising, had this to say,

I think it's pretty positive. We've got a good advising staff here. They've done a great job with me so far. When I came here, I had no clue what I wanted to do with my life, and now, due to the advising staff, I'm pretty much set on a career now.

Speaking about career services, a different student stated, "Career services is great! They've advised me very, very well—matter of fact, they let me know that I probably wouldn't finish in 2 years, that it might take me longer, and I agree with their reasons why." And about registration, a fourth student said, "I think that that's also positive. They try to move as fast as they can, but get what they need to get done and make sure it's done, so I think that's also positive." Exactly half of the sample (5 of 10 students) reported that they had not interacted with the career services staff. One student said, "I have had no opportunity to interact with the career services staff at all." Another simply said, "I haven't been there."

Observed changes

Among the 10 students in the sample from Community College A, three subjects reported that they had not observed any changes in the student affairs operations or environment. However, two of these students were just in their first semester at the institution. The other student was a sophomore. A large majority (70%) reported that they had observed changes in the student services environment. All of these respondents cited the change in location of student services offices and the redesign of

student services for increased efficiency. Some students merely noticed the physical changes in location. Other students connected this change with an increase in the speed of service, convenience, and access to information and staff.

One student said in response to this question, "Nothing, other than locations . . . all I've noticed is they are moving stuff around." Another student commented, "I've noticed that they've grown a lot, gotten bigger. More people have been hired, there's more help to explain things quickly." Another subject talked about the redesign of student services and the increase in efficiency. He said, "They moved all the offices and made them into the Answer Center, and everyone goes there. You get most of your questions answered in one office, rather than make it five different lines." An 18-year-old female had this perspective, "They have just put in an Information Station downstairs, and that helps. . . . It's helpful for the students to just go downstairs and ask questions there instead of coming all the way over here."

Two of the students interviewed were Student Leaders at Community College A. These students had the most insight into the changes that had recently occurred at the institution. One gave a detailed description of the environmental changes and the intent behind the changes. He stated,

These last two semesters we have changed so much. Not only have we changed the location of our office to make it more user-friendly, we have also changed the format and set-up. What we have installed here at Community College A is called the Answer Center, and it is set-up to answer about 80% of students' questions. So, instead of bouncing them around from office to office, we have representatives from each of our offices located at the Answer Center, so they should be able to get most of their questions answered.

Another Student Leader gave a very similar and consistent response. He said,

Definitely. They have made big changes here. We used to have an admissions and an advising and a financial aid [office], and what they did, they combined everything into one called the Answer Center. If they can't answer the student's

question in about 10 minutes, then they send them to a specialist in advising or financial aid. It's kind of a one-stop-shop. It seems to be working really well. Before it was just admissions and you had to go to five different places to get things done, but now they just go to one. It's really nice.

Interestingly, one of the students who reported observing no changes (a first semester, 49-year-old male) spontaneously began comparing the institution to other, out-of-state institutions that he had attended in the past. His comments were some of the most enthusiastic. With regard to the campus environment he said, "The facilities are immaculate. So as far as cleanliness, atmosphere, access to facilities, courteousness of staff—I could not be happier."

Impact of student services on educational outcomes

Three questions were included on the student interview questionnaire about the perceived impact of student services on educational outcomes. The questions focused on the quality of the student services, the physical environment of student services, and the relationship between the quality of student services and goal achievement. With respect to the quality issue, students in the sample at Community College A unanimously felt that the quality of student services does affect educational outcomes. One student expressed his thoughts like this, "Absolutely. I believe that students can be discouraged if the quality of student services is poor, and that is their first impression of the school, is dealing with the staff here [in student services]." Another student said, "Definitely. It could totally change your attitude towards school." A third student also made a connection with student services and student attitudes. He commented, "If you feel lost and out-of-place, you are not going to have a very positive attitude and you are not going to try as hard."

On the topic of the physical environment of student services, 90% (9 out of 10 students) agreed that the physical environment does affect educational outcomes. For these students, convenience and an inviting appearance translated into better outcomes for students. One student said, "location helps because you can get everything in one place, so, like, I can do everything all at once and just get done with it." Another student said,

To a degree, yes. I mean, the acoustics of the room and the lighting, that may or may not have a dramatic affect, but the overall tone of the room, I guess . . . like human atmosphere, like people's attitudes and energies and such—generally you want to be reinforced by positive things rather than people who are yelling about not getting lunch on time, or generally not being happy to be here. That's very discouraging.

Still another student talked about the emotional comfort factor. He said with regard to the physical environment, "Yes, these are the things that actually invite you in . . . no one is going to speak to someone in a place where they feel uncomfortable or get advice from someone in a place where they feel uncomfortable." A fourth student summed-up his perceptions this way,

In my personal opinion, any setting that you come into really does affect the way you feel. As soon as you walk into a room, whether you feel welcomed or not, an inviting place can really change your first impression of it. Definitely, I think the look is important.

All of the students in the sample at Community College A expressed the belief that there was a direct relationship between the quality of the delivery of student services and student goal achievement. Some students cited factors such as support, motivation, and opportunities for involvement while others focused on improved academic outcomes. One student said,

If a student feels that they will be able to go to somebody at the college or institution, and they feel that they will be able to benefit from asking a question

or seeking advice or counsel, [that] is a huge benefit for a student and I feel that it is a huge plus for them to be successful."

Another student commented,

I think that the students who are involved, like with student services and everything, I think they are better off—like more of them are more likely to graduate, go on to get bachelor's, master's degrees, doctorate degrees. They are more likely to do well in their classes.

A third student framed his response in academic terms. He said, "I think the higher the quality [of student services], the better the grades you are going to make and the better you are going to be at achieving your goals."

Macro Themes

Due in large part to the design of the survey instrument, the data on perceptions at Community College A, by both students and faculty/staff/administrators, naturally fell into four major categories, or macro themes. The macro themes evident at Community College A (the Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness) are increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture. These themes are macro themes because they are evident in almost all of the statements provided by the subjects in this study. They tended to be the result, the endpoint, or the concluding idea expressed by the subjects as they reflected on the interview questions.

The subjects may not have used the labels of increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture in their responses; but, clearly, their thinking centered on these themes. For example, the theme of increased student learning is reflected in this statement by an administrator at Community College A, "Absolutely, I think the changes that we've made in student services affect learning outcomes for students."

The theme of increased student success is evident in this statement by a student at Community College A, "I think the higher the quality [of student services], the better the grades you are going to make and the better you are going to be at achieving your goals."

This statement by another student expresses the macro theme of Improved customer service, "They moved all the offices and made them into the answer center, and everyone goes there. You get most of your questions answered in one office, rather than make it five different lines."

And this response by a faculty member falls under the macro theme of a strong learning-centered culture, "There is a greater linkage between academic services and student services. . . . It's seen as a collective group. And a lot of that has come about, certainly, from our change under the learning-centered initiative."

Key Thematic Antecedents

Additional analysis of the data provided by the subjects at Community College A revealed four, key thematic antecedents. These are ideas that contributed to the macro themes or conclusions expressed by the study's participants. Typically, these ideas preceded the macro themes or conclusions in a subject's statements. The thematic antecedents are the "whys" or reasons given by the subjects for the conclusions that they have expressed. They are the smaller pieces, or specific factors, that contribute to the macro themes of increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture.

At Community College A, these four thematic antecedents are attitude, atmosphere, access, and policies/procedures. The following statement reveals the thematic antecedent of Attitude with respect to the macro theme of improved customer

service. Speaking about the admissions staff at Community College A, a student said, "For me personally, when I have dealt with them they have always been extremely friendly and helpful. For the most part, they seem to be willing to always go the extra mile if I have ever needed any help."

The thematic antecedent of atmosphere, as a factor that contributes to the macro theme of increased student learning, appears in this statement by a faculty member,

If you are teaching in an environment which isn't good for the students . . . let's say the lighting is not correct, the a/c is not working well, and you have fans blowing, then it's not going to provide an environment that is going to be conducive to learning. So I think that the atmosphere, the environment around them, you know, how things are set-up in an office makes a big difference in how students learn.

Access is the key thematic antecedent to the macro theme of increased student success in the following statement by an administrator at Community College A. He commented,

With some of the new advances we have done, both in technology and space, we can really spend more time with them [the students] . . . when we were seeing everyone we couldn't spend enough time with people who really needed us. So people who were just interested in transactional stuff had to come in and had to see someone. Well, now they don't have to. We can really spend time with people who need help assessing and working toward their goals.

The fourth thematic antecedent that emerged at Community College A was policies/procedures. The following quote from a student presents policies/procedures as a key factor contributing to the macro theme of increased student learning. Speaking about the policy that requires students to register before the first day of classes, one student noted, "I think it [the policy] really works out to the benefit of the teacher and the students, for the fact that the teacher doesn't have to give orientation at the beginning of the class to new students coming in, and that takes advantage of the time that you have in class."

Many specific factors were cited by the students, faculty, staff, and administrators at Community College A as contributing to the macro themes of increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture. However, all of these contributing factors can be grouped into the four, key thematic antecedents that were previously identified. The following lists illustrate this point.

- Attitude
 - Employee enthusiasm and pride
 - Doing the right thing for students
 - Training and culture building for faculty and staff (including adjuncts)
 - Faculty respect and support for student services
- Atmosphere
 - Redesigned student services
 - Team mentality
 - Personal interactions versus transactional interactions
 - Welcoming and inviting environment
- Access
 - Improved technology (LifeMap implementation)
 - Increased efficiency in student service delivery
 - Redesigned student services
 - Shared governance
- Policies/Procedures
 - Committees and open communication
 - Registration deadline before classes begin
 - Required orientation
 - Investment in staff development

Perceptions at Community College B

The Perceptions of Faculty/Staff/Administrators

College operations

To reiterate, this component of learning-centered student affairs is assessed through questions relating to college operations and requirements in the areas of student assessment, placement, academic advising, orientation, registration, academic alert systems, and class attendance. At Community College B, not all of the faculty/staff/administrators knew if the college had policies and requirements in place to

address these topics. There was some confusion about the details of the policies and requirements. It was apparent that transitions were still occurring in many areas of student affairs practice. Often the faculty, staff, and administrators knew what to do to implement learning-centered principles and improve student affairs practice, but the solutions had not yet been implemented by the institution.

When questioned about whether Community College B had a requirement for new students to attend orientation, one faculty member flatly stated, "I don't know the answer to that. I don't think they are." However, when asked about her perceptions in relation to that aspect of student affairs practice, she conveyed strong feelings. She said, "I think there should be some orientation. . . . That would at least develop some sense of community and help them [the students] succeed."

Confusion also existed in response to the question: "Has the college made it clear that students must register before the first day of class?" One respondent said "No," one respondent said, "Not concretely," and the third said, "I know that we have our normal registration period. I know we have a late registration that we let happen." The third respondent seemed to understand that this was not an ideal situation. He continued by saying, "But we still have problems, I think, because of students that enroll late are allowed to enroll late." This sentiment was echoed by an administrator who noted, "I think that we, meaning the institution, aren't being fair to the student by allowing them to do that." Another faculty member clearly saw the link between this aspect of student affairs practice and student success, or in this case, a lack of student success. In reflecting on late registration he noted, "It would appear that those students who tend to register late are also the ones often that fail the classes."

On the topic of academic early alert systems, all of the faculty/staff/administrators knew that Community College B had a system in place. Yet they seemed unclear about whether it was being used consistently by the faculty. One subject said, "I think there's a way to make it more systematic in the classroom . . . like making a college-wide implementation . . . all the courses [should] have those so that students can always go on-line and check their grades, so it's not left to the individual instructors." Another respondent noted, "I think we need to make it mandatory for our faculty to participate in that and submit accordingly because it's a retention tool, and it's a great retention tool." A faculty member expressed concerns about whether the current system was effective. He conveyed this feedback, "Some people have said, it hasn't happened to me, was that in some cases students, when they got that letter, thought they were flunking and withdrew without ever talking to the professor."

A similar phenomenon was apparent with regard to required class attendance. All of the respondents knew that the college had a policy in place regarding class attendance. Yet, the details of the policy and the level of commitment to the policy seemed to be in question. One administrator said, "The College does have an attendance policy and, of course, it's the 15% rule." That information contradicted the response given by a faculty member who said, "The college policy, I think, is that if you miss more than 10% of the class hours . . . you can be withdrawn from a class." This faculty member even seemed to contradict herself when reflecting further on the attendance requirement. She said, "I mean, it's a hard-pressed policy on my syllabus, but it's not something I necessarily adhere to."

Transition and uncertainty were themes that emerged in response to questions about required student assessment programs and mandatory class placement. All of the

faculty/staff/administrators knew that Community College B had policies regarding assessment and placement. However, one faculty member thought that changes were on the way in the area of required student assessment. She said, "I understand that [P.H.] is leading a Developmental Ed Task Force and they are revising or reviewing . . . they have made some recommendations and they are, I guess, in the process of implementing some changes." With respect to mandatory placement, the same faculty member said, "I know that they are changing the student success scores this fall. There's a revised curriculum that is going into place and that may address some of these issues, but I'm not sure about that."

Shared governance

At Community College B, faculty/staff/administrators were less sure about the extent to which faculty and staff members who are assigned responsibility for implementing student success policies were involved in the development and approval of those policies. One administrator's comments showed this uncertainty. He said, "From the staff side, I could say yes. I'm not sure from the faculty side." He went on to note, "I don't think they are [involved] in the beginning of the process, but it makes it much easier to implement [if they are]."

A faculty member's description of his experience reveals an approach to shared governance at Community College B that seems uncertain and still developing. He characterized his experience as follows,

[I] had an interesting meeting recently where most at the table took exception with those people currently designated as the leaders of the group because they wanted to do kind of a top-down thing. We are going to tell everybody this is our values, core values for the college and this and that, and most of us just really feel like this isn't going to work unless the faculty members . . . it comes kind of from the bottom up. And so that's where the emphasis is now.

Another faculty member also seemed unsure about the degree of faculty and staff involvement in the development of policies, but wanted to give a positive answer.

When asked, she said, "Yes. I don't know to what extent." She went on to describe a somewhat informal arrangement that resulted in a sort of de facto participation. She said, "A lot of it is that you have the same . . . you have an overlap of committees. You have the same people serving on the same committees and it helps create that interaction. And I think district-wide there seems to be some effort to address that."

Impressions of staff

Perceptions of the staff in the areas of admissions, registration, advising, and career services were reported as positive by all the subjects at Community College B—just as was found at Community College A. The staff was often described as helpful, dedicated, and responsive. Newly implemented welcome centers at this institution were cited repeatedly as contributing to the positive impression that subjects had of staff. Just like the faculty at Community College A, faculty at this community college also supported the student development mission by requiring or encouraging students to utilize the student services that are available on campus. One interesting theme that was mentioned by two of the three subjects at this institution was the need to improve the compensation for frontline student service employees.

One faculty member said with regard to the admissions staff,

The people that I know there work long hours, they are not really compensated fairly for what they do or what they are expected to do . . . but they are really dedicated to what they do, and they really want to see the students succeed.

Also with regard to the admissions staff, an administrator commented, "One thing that I really would like to see is that because they are front-line staff, that the institution put some of them on compensation, or look at the compensation packet." This concern was

expressed with regard to the advising staff too. He noted, "Once again, we certainly need to look at what we are . . . our compensation packet for our advisors."

This subject also discussed the impact of the new Welcome Centers on students and employees. He continued,

Prior to the Welcome Centers coming on line and being implemented . . . it kind of left it looking like a barrier and now it's more open and receptive. The ambiance and the atmosphere for the employees have changed. More automation is there for those staff . . . which helps us to help them have more positive attitudes.

A faculty member also focused on the improvements to the student services environment. With regard to registration he commented, "I think there's been a lot of improvements. They try to create an environment that makes it easier, more understandable for the students."

This same faculty member noted that he linked with students services as a requirement for one of his classes. He explained,

I think our career center does a pretty good job. When I was teaching college success skills I would have them on as guest speakers and we would go down there and visit their facilities. It seems like it's a pretty good system.

Another faculty member gave extra credit to students who explored students services. While it was not a requirement, she seemed to feel that it was important enough to be addressed more formally. She said,

"My impression is positive. I know the people that work over there. It's a wonderful resource for students, but I think it's under-used." She concluded by saying, "I wish I had a more systematic approach to it. It's just, sort of, yeah, try this. Do you know about this?"

Observed changes

At Community College B, one of the most striking things about the responses of the subjects, especially when compared with those at Community College A, is the

length of the responses. At Community College A, each subject talked in detail about numerous learning-centered changes to the student affairs environment. In contrast, the responses from subjects at Community College B were very short and mostly limited to changes in the physical surroundings of the student services area. Almost no commentary was recorded with respect to functional changes or the theoretical models that accompanied the modifications to the environment.

Changes to the student services organizational chart and the work of a college-wide task force were mentioned. The theme of transition was also evident in the comments about these topics. Overall, the subjects thought the changes were positive, but there was little enthusiasm or pride evident in the statements that were made.

One faculty member described the changes like this,

Well, we had all these, what they call, *Welcome Centers* open up, like what you see here, and this has all been revised, and just the layout and the facilities—the flow, you know? All those kinds of things have been positive and beneficial. You kind of get more of a one-stop shop, and because of the flow, there's a lot more fluidness . . . so that's been good. I think that's been positive.

Another faculty member agreed about the changes she had observed. She stated, "The biggest one is the physical arrangement out there, which has made a huge improvement in the communication with one another." She also recognized the value of common space for students. She noted, "And having a lounge where students can sit and talk . . . you have a gathering space for students . . . so that's been a big change, and that's a positive."

An administrator focused his comments on the increase in the amount of work for student development staff. He seemed to be almost complaining when he stated,

I've noticed that the processes have certainly increased, in terms of the admissions area, what we are asking the staff to review before a student registers

and the different types of things that they have to monitor before they input a registration form.

He continued this theme with respect to academic advising. He noted, "And on the advising side, it's increasing in terms of the responsibility and bringing into focus some new initiatives that have been introduced this year." He concluded his comments with a positive spin by saying, "But over the 4- to 5-year period I think it's really been positive."

The only other key ideas that appeared in the responses to this question dealt with changes to the organizational structure in student affairs and some references to progress being made by a developmental education task force. One faculty member commented,

They've done a re-alignment since SACS where they put all the deans under a central district-wide dean's office, and I think he's still trying to work that, because before the deans were under the individual campus presidents, but the goal there . . . I think the outcome could be good potentially to again add more standardization of services between the different campuses.

Another faculty member offered this observation that seemed to reinforce the idea that things were still in a state of transition, "The Developmental Ed Task Force, I have seen them really moving to take steps towards a more coherent, more comprehensive approach to guiding students through and giving them what they need, but I think it's still in the early stages."

Impact of Student Services on Educational Outcomes

The faculty, staff, and administrators at Community College B gave responses similar to those at Community College A. They thought that the quality of student services positively affects learning outcomes. However, the same conviction was not apparent in their responses, and there did not appear to be as much support from the

faculty on this point as there was at Community College A. At the Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness, almost all of the responses began strongly affirmative with words like "Absolutely" or "Yes." This is in contrast to Community College B where responses typically began with the words, "I think so" or "I believe it does." Again, in a fashion similar to the responses from Community College A, subjects reported that they felt the quality of the physical environment was positively related to educational outcomes, student success, and institutional performance.

When asked directly if the quality of student services affects educational outcomes, one subject said, "Oh, yeah. I think so." Another subject said, "Yes, I sure do." But then added, "Student services is just one leg of a student's success." Yet another participant, a faculty member, said, "I think in a lot of ways it does," but then also qualified his statement by saying,

I still feel the major factor that affects whether students succeed or don't succeed is the quality of instruction in the classroom. That's not to diminish the importance of student services, but I kind of got the feeling some people think, well if we could just do more with the student services and really have this, that this would be the solution, and to me it's not.

On the issue of the physical environment, there was a clearer, more consistent view. One subject said,

I tell you what—it certainly makes you feel good when you walk into a place that's warm and receptive and it looks clean, and it looks bright, and it looks cheerful, and it looks like, Wow! And I think students have that same feeling about the physical environment.

A faculty member concurred. He said, "You know, when you go into a nice facility, I don't care if it is student services or the classroom, I just think it has a special feel to it." Later he continued by saying,

If you are going in there and the table has got missing Formica and the chairs are wobbly and falling apart, and ceiling tiles are missing and stained, and lights are

burned out and there's garbage on the floors and old broken podiums and pointers and chalk and junk laying all over, strewn around, I don't think that creates the right mindset for these students.

With regard to the relationship between the quality of delivery of student services and students achieving their educational goals, there was again a consistent view among the study's participants at Community College B. One subject said, "If we deliver stellar services to our students, then certainly one would think that the results would mean that all of our students would feel that we have met their expectations and helped them to reach their educational goals." Another subject said, "If we can have resources that can help them with those issues, then you can get them in the classroom and help them learn and, you know, like I said, ultimately it's a win-win for everybody if they are successful."

The Perceptions of Students

College operations

To review, seven questions assessed student perceptions about college requirements and policies in seven key areas of student affairs practice. These areas are student assessment, placement, academic advising, orientation, registration, academic early alert systems, and attendance. Because of the volume of data collected, each area will be treated individually. Then a summary of the observations relating to college operations at Community College B will be provided.

The requirement for student assessment examinations was the first question in the section on college operations. At Community College B, 6 of the 10 students in the sample (60%) knew that the college had a required student assessment program designed to identify specific areas in need of remediation. Of those 6 subjects, 5 expressed positive feelings about the program. One had a negative perception of the

assessment program and the AA curriculum in general. Four students stated that they did not know if the college had an assessment program. Of those 4 students, one felt that the college should have such a program. When asked about this requirement she said, "I don't know. I just think it's a good thing if the college does have one. If they don't, they should get one." This sentiment was echoed by many of the subjects who expressed positive feelings about the program. One said, "It's good. It's bringing them up to college level. I had to take a math prep, and that was helpful to me." Another respondent commented, "I think it's good because there's no way I would have been able to pass the regular math class, so it was helpful for me." While the majority of the sample reported these positive perceptions, there was one dissenting voice. One sophomore stated, "I'm not understanding why we are doing this repetitive process. Like getting an associates degree is the same as getting a high school diploma, except we pay for it." He concluded, "I'm just a little bitter. I'm just about to get my associates degree, but I haven't taken a single class in college that I hadn't taken in high school."

Mandatory class placement based on assessment scores was the next area of student affairs practice to be examined at Community College B. Seven of the 10 students in this sample knew that the college would make class placements based on the assessment scores that students earned. Three of the subjects responded that they did not know if the college had a mandatory placement requirement. Among those participants who did know about the requirement, there was a unanimous feeling that such a requirement would be a good thing, and that it would be helpful in terms of student success. One student said, "It's fine. You should be up to par all the way around, otherwise you are going to struggle." Another student said, "I think it's a good

idea because I don't want to be rushed into college algebra." A third student summed-up her feelings like this,

Entering Community College B I took the prep algebra . . . then I took intermediate algebra, and then I took college algebra, so I guess those prepared me for college algebra rather than jumping into college algebra and getting an F, so I think that was great!

The next question about college operations asked if all students were required to explore their educational goals with an academic advisor every term. At Community College B, 60% of the students in the sample knew that all students were not required to meet with an academic advisor every term. Two students (20%) thought that it was a college requirement to do so. Two other subjects either did not know or did not directly answer the question. Among the students who correctly identified the college policy, perceptions were consistent that advising should not be required every term and that students should, ultimately, be responsible for the majority of their own academic planning.

Even with that said, almost all of the students who commented on the quality of the academic advising felt that it was positive and helpful. Only one subject commented on the idea that some advisors were better than others. The following responses were typical of those given by the students who knew academic advising was not required every term. One said, "I think that most people that go to this school are old enough to know they need to take responsibility. . . . You should know that if you are not knowing where to go or what classes to take you should talk to someone." Another student commented, "You are in college. You need to be responsible at some point and if you have an idea of where you are going and if you are getting there alright, then I don't see a real need to do it." Some of the positive comments about advisors and advising

consisted of statements such as this one by a sophomore, male student, "Most of the advisors are quite adept." Another sophomore male said, "I don't think they should be required to do it [academic advising], but it's helpful to the students." A freshman female student said, "It's helpful to know, like if you want to change your major or what you want to really do, so I think it's useful." As stated earlier, only one student in the sample provided comments that suggested a partial lack of quality in the academic advising experience. A sophomore, female student commented, "That's [the decision to see an academic advisor] up to the student because the advisors can be good at it or they can be not good at it."

The next area of student affairs practice to be examined was orientation. Students were questioned on whether the college required new students to attend orientation, as well as their perceptions about the college policy. The overwhelming majority of students sampled (90%) knew that orientation was required for new students. Additionally, 80% of the sample had very positive impressions of their orientation experience. Only one student reported a negative perception regarding orientation. One subject, a transfer student, did not attend an orientation at Community College B. With regard to positive perceptions of the required orientation, one student said, "I think new students should be required to participate in orientation. It gives you a chance to learn about the college." Another student voiced a similar opinion. She commented, "I liked going to orientation. They showed me the school and they talked about all the services they have, so I think it's useful for everybody." Several students satisfied the orientation requirement through an online option. Many expressed satisfaction with the convenience that this provided. One student said, "I actually liked the online orientation I did." Another respondent noted, "I thought it was interesting. I

actually did it online, which was nice, you know, because you don't have to come here early and stay here for a long time." There was only one negative view about the online orientation. One student stated, "I did mine online, so I didn't really get too much from that." Although, when asked if the online option was convenient, the subject confirmed that it was. The only other negative comment about orientation was registered by a first year, female student. She said, "It's okay, except sometimes it's boring."

On the topic of students being required to register before the first day of classes, subjects sampled at Community College B appeared to be unclear about the policy. Four students thought that the college did have a requirement to register before the first day of classes. Two students reported that the college did not have this policy. Additionally, four students said that they did not know if the college had such a requirement, or they gave contradicting answers to the question. However, two students did connect the possibility of late registration with diminished student learning. The difference in student perceptions about the policy is illustrated by the following quotes. One student said, "I think they made it clear because there's the deadline that you need to register, and there's online registration and there's walk-in registration and there's deadlines for those, so I think that's clear." However, this view was contradicted by another student who described his own, recent, experience with registration. He stated,

Yes and no. They really put it in writing and punch it out, like, you know, you have to do this, this, and this by that date. But, at the same point, like, just now, I dropped a class and added a class without any real problems. Mind you, it was just the day after the first day of classes, so I'm sure it wasn't that big of a deal.

Later he said, "It's nice to have that availability to be able to drop something and add another." Other students in the sample saw it differently, though. One said, "If you wait until like 2 weeks after the semester to register for your classes, then your grades

are going to suffer." Another student noted, "I think they should [have a requirement to register before the first day of classes] because then that way the teachers have the rosters and they know how many are going to be in the class and make sure there's enough books in the bookstore."

Students at Community College B were also asked whether the college had an academic early alert system. Six of the 10 students in the sample (60%) knew that the college had such a system. One said that the college did not have an academic early alert system, and three students did not know. Themes similar to those expressed about other areas of student affairs practice were evident in the subjects' responses. Many felt that it was a helpful service to students, while a smaller number felt that college students needed to be responsible for monitoring their own grades and taking action if grades were poor. These themes are reflected in the responses presented below. One student said, "It's good. It shows that the school is watching what you are doing and making sure that you are staying on top of it, which is good." Another student said, "It's a good idea. It helps you get on the ball early—before it's too late." A third student said, "Yes, I received one of those letters once, and they do a really good job of following-up with that. . . . Overall, it was helpful." Two students had a differing opinion. One said,

We are college students. We should be aware of what we are doing in our classes. That [an academic early alert system] would just make some administrator's life in an office that much more difficult. That's just one more useless thing for someone in an office to do.

A second student was less vehement. Nevertheless, he repeated the idea that responsibility is a student's job. He noted,

This is a college level, so the student has to be responsible for their classes. If [the] college tells the student or notifies them of how they are doing, there's nothing negative, but I think it's more a responsibility of the student.

The final key element of student affairs practice that was examined in the section on college operations was class attendance requirements. On this issue there was unanimous agreement and affirmation that the college did have an attendance policy. Even though they were not asked to explain the policy, the majority of the students volunteered this information. Each student reported consistent information: The college policy is that you cannot miss more than 15% of the classes. Some of the respondents did note that teachers could and did modify the policy, and would exercise judgment regarding the reasons why a student was absent. Subjects also reported that financial aid was linked to attendance. Overall, the student's perceptions of this policy were positive and some linked the requirement to enhanced student learning. For example, one student said, "But it is definitely important, especially in college, to come to class when your class is only two times a week, because you might miss a lot. So I try to come as much as I can." Another student had similar feelings, "I think it's a good thing. I know, personally, I got into an accident last semester. I missed two classes and I was lost, so I wouldn't want to miss more than two classes." One student described the flexibility that faculty exercised like this,

Some of the instructors are a little more lax because they are of the opinion that you are paying for the class . . . and as long as you show up for the tests, and you do the homework, and you complete the requirements, and you know the material, well then you get credit for the class. Other instructors are more adamant about attendance and paying attention and all that kind of stuff.

Student perceptions regarding college operations at Community College B are very similar to those found at Community College A. Most of the subjects in the sample knew the institution's policies and requirements in the key areas of student affairs

practice. In all areas of practice, more students reported positive feelings and perceptions than reported negative feelings and perceptions. Descriptors such as "helpful," "beneficial," and "worth it" were used consistently by the subjects at this institution to describe the key student affairs practices. When disagreement with college requirements did surface, it was often because the subjects felt that the students should be responsible for their actions, for their learning, and for their success (or failure) at the institution. In the case of online orientation, several students understood that technology contributed to a more convenient and efficient delivery of student services. For most of the key areas of student affairs practice that were examined, about one quarter to one third of the students connected the college policies and procedures to enhanced student learning. They understood that the student service policies and requirements existed to improve their college experience and, ultimately, contributed to their success and goal attainment.

Impressions of staff

The responses of the students at Community College B to the four questions about staff in admissions, registration, advising, and career services were very similar to the responses of the students at Community College A—overwhelmingly positive. Of the 40 total possible responses, only 3 were negative in any way. All of these were from the same student. In all areas examined, students spoke in an exceedingly positive manner about the student services staff. Some of the adjectives they used to describe staff members were: helpful, positive, friendly, polite, knowledgeable, motivating, and efficient. An even larger percentage of the students at Community College B (70% versus 50% at Community College A) reported that they had not used the career services area and not interacted with the career services staff.

Some of the positive comments by students are listed below. One student described her experience with academic advisors like this, "[It was] positive. Normally, when they don't know the answer, they normally direct me exactly to the person who knows the answer that I'm looking for. The advisors are very knowledgeable. They do a fine job." Another student was even more positive about the academic advisors. She said, "When I went there it was always a family-oriented situation, everybody was friendly, so it was a really good experience." She continued,

It made me feel pretty good, I guess, pretty positive . . . motivating. They are always asking how's your grades. They were always interested in what was going on, I think, with all the students. Especially if you are full-time and you are there a lot, you tend to know everybody by name, so it was pretty positive.

A third student said this about the registration staff, "They are normally happy about what they are doing, pretty efficient." About admissions staff, a different student said, "A lot of the staff is really knowledgeable, and they definitely know what they are doing." With regard to career services, another student stated, "I've used that service, and I think it's very good, and they are always very helpful." The negative comments that were recorded were all registered by one student. They were only slightly negative and some were not based on firsthand knowledge. She said about the admissions staff, "They are helpful, but sometimes they don't know everything they should know, or they can't always answer all the questions and stuff." And about registration staff, the student noted, "I don't really have an interaction with them. I've heard that they are pretty slow."

Observed changes

Overall, fewer students at Community College B reported observing changes in the student affairs environment during their time at the institution than at Community

College A. Half of the 10 students interviewed said that they had not noticed any changes. Of the students who did report that they had observed changes within student services, only one discussed changes to the physical environment, which had recently undergone a major renovation and redesign to create a more learning-centered, customer-service oriented, facility and environment. Nevertheless, all of the students who did notice changes talked about improvements that were consistent with the intention of Community College B to create a more user-friendly, efficient, and learning-centered experience for students.

One student conveyed the following thoughts, "I find that I have information like anywhere now. If you need a book or anything, they always have everything out for you. It's easy to get add/drop forms or whatever you need." Another student commented, "The only changes I've seen, I guess, are improvements with their, I guess, changes around the area that make it more comfortable and convenient." One sophomore male wasn't sure why things were different, but he knew his experience with academic advising had improved. He noted, "I would like to say that, for some reason, there seems to be more advisors now than there was when I first started. I remember waiting like three hours or something to see an advisor, like last fall."

Another student who worked at the college as a student assistant was able to cite a specific change in technology that was beneficial to students. He commented, "There are always changes, new computers, new programs. It's helpful for the students." A sophomore female student who had already earned an AA degree at the college had the longest perspective. She stated, "Well, I started going here a long time ago, and they were redoing the whole building, so there's been a lot of changes, but I don't know that there's that much difference." However, when asked about her feelings regarding the

changes she had observed, she noted an increase in efficiency. She said, "It's really nice, and it's a lot easier to find things. Before it was a mess, and you couldn't figure out where you had to go and who you had to see."

Just as with Community College A, one of the students at Community College B who said that he had not observed any changes provided one of the best testimonials about learning-centeredness. He commented, "I haven't seen any changes . . . there's always fresh coffee and popcorn. CNN is always on . . . it's a welcoming area, not like a lot of other community colleges."

Impact of student services on educational outcomes

Three questions were included on the student interview questionnaire about the perceived impact of student services on educational outcomes. The questions focused on the quality of the student services, the physical environment of student services, and the relationship between the quality of student services and goal achievement. The students at Community College B were not as sure as the students at Community College A about the impact student services had on goal attainment and educational outcomes. At Community College A, all of the students agreed that the quality of student services and the physical environment were important factors in determining educational outcomes, including academic achievement. They routinely used words like "absolutely" and "definitely." At Community College B, only half (5 of 10) of the students in the sample felt that there was a strong relationship between the quality of student services and educational outcomes. Another four thought that the impact of student services and the student services environment was only marginal. One student did not see any relationship between student services and educational outcomes.

On the first question in the series that dealt with the quality of student services, the following response was typical of the students who felt that the quality of student services did affect educational outcomes. The subject said, "Yes, of course. If you have all the information here on campus and you can get it and you can do all your work here on campus, there is a positive outcome." Another student said, "Yes, I do. I think if the student services are poor and it's negative, it tends to not really inspire you, or not give you a positive outlook." Other students were not so sure. One said, "I think it could." Another said, "Maybe to a small degree." A third student simply said, "I don't know if student services affects educational outcomes." And one student totally disagreed. She said, "Not really. I can see no relationship between the two."

Regarding the second question that dealt with the physical environment of student services, the pattern of responses was very similar. One student said, "I would think so. I've seen a lot of improvements to the physical environment, and it's much better and more sophisticated. It makes you want to be in that environment. It makes you want to come to school." Another student commented, "Yes. The environment always affects our lives because, for example, if you are in a happy place, a warm place, you feel comfortable—more comfortable than in other places." Another set of responses was less definitive. Two subjects said, "I don't think so." Another student said, "I don't know if it affects educational outcomes, but it makes everyone feel more comfortable coming to school."

Finally, students were asked, "What relationship do you perceive between the quality of the delivery of student services and students achieving their educational goals?" Overall, the responses to this question were the least positive. One student replied, "I think there is a strong relationship, because if you have a quality education

when you get out of college, you are going to serve well the community with quality."

Another student stated, "If the staff is good and everything, and the student center is good, it's obviously going to have a positive impact on the students, but in the end . . . if the student wants to succeed, he or she will succeed no matter what." Another subject said, "Yes and no. I would say that it depends strictly on the student. If they are goal-oriented enough, then it doesn't matter how incompetent student services is going to be, they'll find their own information, they'll find their own way to get it done." And a fourth student saw no relationship. She said, "Quality has nothing to do with it. I mean, the quality of teachers, yes. You would need good teachers, but as for anything else, no."

Macro Themes

At Community College B, two of the four themes that were found at Community College A emerged as macro themes. Again, this was due, in large part, to the design of the interview questionnaires that were focused on the topic of learning-centeredness. To review, macro themes are the major ideas or conclusions that appear in almost all of the statements provided by the subjects in the sample. The two macro themes that were evident at Community College B were increased student success, and improved customer service. The macro themes of increased student learning and a strong learning-centered culture that were evident at Community College A did not emerge in the responses of the participants at Community College B. Furthermore, the macro themes that were found at Community College B, were typically expressed with less certainty, and by fewer subjects. For example, all 10 of the students at Community College A reported that they felt the quality of student services affects educational outcomes. Whereas, at Community College B, only 5 of 10, or 50% of the students in

the sample reported the perception that the quality of student services affects educational outcomes.

Nevertheless, the macro theme of Increased Student Success was apparent in this statement by a subject at Community College B. "If we deliver stellar services to our students, then certainly one would think that the results would mean that all of our students would feel that we have met their expectations and helped them to reach their educational goals."

Additionally, a student commenting on changes that he had observed at Community College B focused on the macro theme of Improved customer service. He said, "I would like to say that, for some reason, there seems to be more advisors now than there was when I first started. I remember waiting like three hours or something to see an advisor, like last fall."

Key Thematic Antecedents

Thematic antecedents are the ideas, or specific factors, that contribute to the formation of macro themes. They typically occur before the conclusion, or macro theme, in a subject's response. The thematic antecedents are the "whys" or reasons given by subjects for the conclusions that they have expressed. All four of the key thematic antecedents that were found at Community College A were also found at Community College B: attitude, atmosphere, access, and policies/procedures.

A statement by a faculty member at Community College B about the admissions staff reflects the thematic antecedent of attitude with respect to increased student success. The faculty member said,

The people that I know there [in admissions] work long hours, they are not really compensated fairly for what they do, or what they are expected to do . . . but they

are really dedicated to what they do, and they really want to see students succeed.

Likewise, the thematic antecedent of Atmosphere appears in this statement by a student and is linked to the macro theme of increased student success. "I've seen a lot of improvements to the physical environment and it's much better and more sophisticated. It makes you want to be in that environment. It makes you want to come to school."

Regarding access, one student at Community College B made a connection with the macro theme of improved customer service. She stated, "I find that I have [access to] information like anywhere now. If you need a book or anything, they always have everything out for you. It's easy to get add/drop forms or whatever you need."

Additionally, this statement about academic early alerts by a subject in the sample of faculty, staff, and administrators references policies/procedures as an antecedent to the macro theme of increased student success. The subject stated, "I think we need to make it mandatory for our faculty to participate in that [academic early alerts] and submit accordingly because it's a retention tool, and it's a great retention tool."

In a manner similar to that found at Community College A, the respondents at Community College B cited a number of varied factors that contributed to their conclusions about the macro themes of increased student success and improved customer service. Even so, all of these individual factors can be grouped into the four key thematic antecedents of attitude, atmosphere, access, and policies/procedures. The list below illustrates this concept.

- Attitude
 - Helpful, Dedicated, Responsive Staff

- Motivational Advisors
- Atmosphere
 - Welcome Centers
 - Open, Receptive Environment
- Access
 - Additional Advisors
 - Online Orientation
- Policies/Procedures
 - Attendance Requirement
 - Mandatory Orientation

It should also be noted that some major differences were observed in the responses at Community College B, when compared to Community College A (the Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness). First, there was considerable disagreement or inconsistency expressed by both faculty/staff/administrators and students about the specifics of many college policies and procedures. This suggests that communication has not been clear, or that it has been confusing with respect to the learning-centered changes that have been implemented. Second, many of the faculty/staff/administrator responses talked about policies, structures, and procedures that were in the midst of change and transition. Third, the length and breadth of the responses from both samples (students and faculty/staff/administrators) at Community College B were less impressive than those collected at Community College A. Finally, there was less enthusiasm, pride, and excitement about learning-centeredness expressed by the subjects in both samples at Community College B than at Community College A.

Summary

This chapter reported the perceptions of the interviewees and placed them within macro themes. These were related to more precise and identifiable characteristics or antecedents that could be used to provide student affairs with an operational set of characteristics. These characteristics could be formed into a definition or plan for student affairs movement towards creating a learning-centered environment.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine the phenomenon of student, faculty, staff and administrative perceptions of the link between learning-centered philosophy and environmental change within student affairs at a Florida community college. The recent growth in the learning-centered movement within community colleges, and the lack of understanding of its holistic nature by community college professionals, has led to the need for this study to expand the body of knowledge concerning learning-centeredness and the effect of environmental factors on institutional perceptions.

This study used qualitative research methods to collect data at two institutions. One was Community College A, a Vanguard Institution for learning-centeredness as designated by the League for Innovation in the Community College. The other was Community College B—the institution of interest in this study. Over the past 5 years, Community College B has been implementing learning-centered strategies through its division of student affairs. This researcher looked for common descriptions in the perceptions of students, faculty, staff, and administrators and investigated their connection to learning-centeredness at both institutions. This increased the validity of the study by providing a known standard, or benchmark, for the perceptions of learning-centeredness that were collected at Community College B. If any of the links or phenomena were observed, verified and documented at both institutions, then one

could infer that a similar, learning-centered environment had been created at both institutions. As the data from both institutions was analyzed, a grounded theory was developed to explain the link between learning-centered environmental change and institutional perceptions. This culminated in the addition of another facet of theory regarding the learning college concept, student affairs, student-institution interaction, and environmental change.

The data on perceptions at Community College A, by both students and faculty/staff/administrators, fell into four macro themes. These themes were increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture. These themes tended to be the result, the endpoint, or the concluding idea expressed by the subjects as they reflected on the interview questions.

The subjects may not have used the labels of increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture in their responses; but, clearly, their thinking centered on these themes. For example, the theme of increased student learning is reflected in this statement by an administrator at Community College A, "Absolutely, I think the changes that we've made in student services affect learning outcomes for students." The theme of increased student success is evident in this statement by a student at Community College A, "I think the higher the quality [of student services], the better the grades you are going to make and the better you are going to be at achieving your goals." Another student expressed the theme of improved customer service, "They moved all the offices and made them into the Answer Center, and everyone goes there. You get most of your questions answered in one office, rather than make it five different lines."

Finally, a strong learning-centered culture fits this response by a faculty member; “There is a greater linkage between academic services and student services. . . . It’s seen as a collective group. And a lot of that has come about, certainly, from our change under the learning-centered initiative.”

Additional analysis of the data provided by the subjects at Community College A revealed four, key thematic antecedents. These are ideas that contributed to the macro themes or conclusions expressed by the study’s participants. Typically, these ideas preceded the macro themes or conclusions in a subject’s statements. The thematic antecedents are the “whys” or reasons given by the subjects for the conclusions that they have expressed. They are the smaller pieces, or specific factors, that contribute to the macro themes of increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture.

At Community College A, these four thematic antecedents are attitude, atmosphere, access, and policies/procedures. Other factors were identified by the subjects in the study, but they were clearly subsets of attitude, atmosphere, access, and policies/procedures as shown in the following lists:

- Attitude
 - Employee Enthusiasm and Pride
 - Doing the Right Thing for Students
 - Training and Culture Building for Faculty and Staff (including adjuncts)
 - Faculty Respect and Support for Student Services
- Atmosphere
 - Redesigned Student Services
 - Team Mentality
 - Personal Interactions versus Transactional Interactions
 - Welcoming and Inviting Environment
- Access
 - Improved Technology (LifeMap Implementation)
 - Increased Efficiency in Student Service Delivery
 - Redesigned Student Services
 - Shared Governance

- Policies/Procedures
 - Committees and Open Communication
 - Registration Deadline Before Classes Begin
 - Required Orientation
 - Investment in Staff Development

While the series of changes made within student affairs at Community College B were grounded in learning-centered theory, and did have some positive perceptual responses, they fell far short of those at Community College A. In fact, the data indicated a clear disconnect within Community College B in terms of their implementation of the learning-centered environment. This might suggest a lack of commitment on the part of the institutional leadership to create, foster, and sustain any type of collegewide initiative to move toward creating a learning-centered environment. Because of this disconnect, this researcher suggests that the link between institutional leadership and the achievement of a learning-centered environment warrants further exploration and research.

It was apparent that because of institutional commitment, Community College A was far ahead of Community College B in creating a learning-centered environment, both within student affairs and collegewide. At Community College A, there was a high level of mission authenticity (are you doing what you say you're doing). Also detected was a high level of dynamic congruence (cooperation, communication, and collaboration) between faculty and student affairs staff at Community College A. This was not the case at Community College B. In fact, a serious lack of communication and confusion was detected among all participants of the study. The data suggests that while changes were implemented at Community College B based on learning-centered theory, only the first phases of a multi-phase learning shift occurred. It is as if something had been started and then dropped, or relegated to a less important status institutionally, and the proper follow-

through was never initiated. This would account for the lack of understanding as to why things were done in the student affairs area, and for the confusion over what was actually accomplished. As indicated previously, there were some positive learning-centered outcomes at Community College B. Perceptions of the student affairs staff were reported as being positive and supporting. The physical space changes provided easier access to resources and the atmosphere of the environment was more positive and supporting. However, there was no sense of the sustainability of this environment, or of any expanded understanding of what the role of student affairs is in a learning-centered setting on the part of the student affairs personnel.

Overall, student perceptions regarding college operations at Community College B were similar to those found at Community College A. Most of the subjects were aware of the institution's policies and requirements in key areas of student affairs practice. In all areas of student affairs practice that were measured, more students reported positive feelings and perceptions than reported negative feelings and perceptions. Descriptors such as "helpful," "beneficial," and "worth it" were used consistently by the subjects at this institution to describe the student affairs practices. When disagreement with college requirements did surface, it was often because the subjects felt that the students should be more responsible for their actions, for their learning, and for their success (or failure) at the institution.

This was an issue at both institutions. Some of the students desired to take an increased responsibility for their educational destinies. This was observed in responses that indicated that seeing an advisor was not necessary, that there was no need to go to college orientations, and that students should be allowed to take whatever classes they wanted without regard for prerequisites. This begs the question, do students possess the

tools and abilities to make these kinds of decisions and does/should the college have a structure in place to allow or facilitate this increased student responsibility? From a student affairs perspective, how do we go about doing this, and how do we address the student's interest in being provided a high level of autonomy in their educational decision making?

Clearly, in some instances when dealing with an adult student population, the answer to the question would be yes. The second question is a little more difficult to answer. Nevertheless, this issue was addressed at Community College A using a three-tiered approach. The institution provided students with three levels of service to help them make their own decisions within the scope of their abilities. One was the "Information Station" staffed by trained students to help with transactional issues, such as providing class schedules, add/drop forms, applications and other types of basic information and support. The next level consisted of the "Answer Center" a one-stop approach to student services. This center was staffed by cross-trained personnel who could answer questions in the areas of advising, financial aid, student support services, and college policies and procedures. The third level consisted of trained specialists who were available to help students with more complicated issues dealing with advisement, registration, career planning, financial aid, and other complex student issues.

Community College B had no such system in place, although part of the environmental change did include the potential for an information station arrangement in the new welcome centers. Community College A also provided another tool that helped students expand their autonomy by taking responsibility for academic planning, class selection, and registration. LifeMap is an online system that an advisor can use with students to lay out the curriculum for their major from the time they start to educational

goal attainment. The college also provides what one could call “safety nets” for those students who have embraced this responsibility for their educational destinies, but have not been able to perform as they had hoped. These consist of an early alert system, where a faculty member alerts the student and student affairs in writing that the student may be in academic jeopardy in their class. This is done prior to the last day to withdraw, and it encourages the student to seek help from student services or directly from the faculty member. The student also has the option to consult with an advisor at any time they feel it is necessary. Both of these options give students the ability to address any problem that may become detrimental to their academic progress and initiate the withdrawal process only as a last resort. In the learning-centered philosophy, engaging the student as a full partner in the learning process is critical. An added benefit to this system is that it encourages Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to work collaboratively in support of student success and learning.

At Community College B, two of the four themes that were found at Community College A emerged as macro themes. To review, macro themes are the major ideas or conclusions that appear in almost all of the statements provided by the subjects in the sample. The two macro themes that were evident at Community College B are increased student success, and improved customer service. The macro themes of increased student learning and a strong learning-centered culture that were evident at Community College A did not emerge in the responses of the participants at Community College B. Furthermore, the macro themes that were found at Community College B, were typically expressed with less certainty, and by fewer subjects. For example, all 10 of the students at Community College A reported that they felt the quality of student services affects educational outcomes. This was in contrast to Community College B where only 50% of

the students in the sample reported the perception that the quality of student services affects educational outcomes.

Some other major differences were observed in the responses at Community College B, when compared to Community College A. First, there was considerable disagreement or inconsistency expressed by both faculty/staff/administrators and students about the specifics of many college policies and procedures. This suggests that communication has not been clear, or that it has been confusing with respect to the learning-centered changes that have been implemented. Second, many of the faculty/staff/administrator responses talked about policies, structures, and procedures that were in the midst of change and transition. Third, the length and breadth of the responses from both samples (students and faculty/staff/administrators) at Community College B were less impressive than those collected at Community College A. Finally, there was less enthusiasm, pride, and excitement about learning-centeredness expressed by the subjects at Community College B than at Community College A.

Thematic antecedents are the ideas, or specific factors, that contribute to the formation of macro themes. They typically occur before the conclusion, or macro theme, in a subject's response. The thematic antecedents are the "whys" or reasons given by subjects for the conclusions that they have expressed. All four of the key thematic antecedents that were found at Community College A were also found at Community College B: attitude, atmosphere, access, and policies/procedures.

- Attitude
 - Helpful, Dedicated, Responsive Staff
 - Motivational Advisors
- Atmosphere
 - Welcome Centers
 - Open, Receptive Environment

- Access
 - Additional Advisors
 - Online Orientation
- Policies/Procedures
 - Attendance Requirement
 - Mandatory Orientation

These key thematic antecedents are extremely valuable in understanding the dynamic of learning-centered environmental change. They represent at least some of the specific, core components that must be influenced in order to move an institution toward greater learning-centeredness. Essentially, they form the basis for an operational definition of learning-centeredness in student affairs practice. At the most basic level, these are some of the individual factors that institution-level practitioners must address and measure in order to become more learning centered.

Another point that emerged from this study was the role that effective, accurate, and timely communication plays in the success or failure of any learning-centered initiative. As data were reviewed, a very clear picture of the critical nature of this communication became evident. At Community College A, lines of communication were established at all levels of the institution and a continuous flow of information was provided to all stakeholders explaining their role and function in a learning-centered environment. Soliciting stakeholder input also contributed to the formation and improvement of this environment. Students, faculty, and staff showed a clear understanding of the learning-centered environment that had been created and its benefits.

At Community College B, not all of the faculty/staff/administrators knew if the college had policies and requirements in place to address specific topics considered in the questionnaire. There was some confusion about the details of the policies and

requirements. It was apparent that transitions were still occurring in many areas of student affairs practice. Often the faculty, staff, and administrators knew what to do to implement learning-centered principles and improve student affairs practice, but the solutions had not yet been implemented by the institution. This highlights the final point that emerged from this study. Without effective leadership and a sustained institutional commitment to the implementation of a learning-centered environment, efforts by a single division (such as student affairs) will be only marginally effective.

Conclusions

Based on data gathered from this study the following conclusions were drawn:

Community College A

- Community College A had created a collegewide learning-centered environment
- Community College A, through its collegewide communications and buy in by all stakeholders, had created a sustainable learning-centered environment
- Students, faculty and staff at community college A understand and embrace their role in creating and sustaining this learning-centered environment
- Student affairs has played a significant part in the institutional transformation process
- Students, faculty and staff feel that recent learning-centered changes within student affairs have had a positive impact on the educational success of students.

Community College B

- A pervasive learning-centered environment was not found at Community College B.
- Some components of environmental changes in student affairs were perceived as having had a positive impact on the educational success of students.
- Full institutional support for creation of a learning-centered environment was not evident at Community College B.

- Communication about, and understanding of, environmental learning-centered changes in student affairs was poorly executed and not understood by many faculty, staff and students.
- Some components of a learning-centered environment have been put into place within student affairs and are having the desired effect on students.
- Under current leadership there is no sustainability of a collegewide learning-centered environment.
- Student affairs can act as an institutional integrator of learning-centeredness; but, it must have on-going institutional support and recognition as such to be successful.

The data have shown that when top-down support is provided in the move toward a learning-centered environment, its effect will be felt collegewide. Given this commitment over time, the institutional culture will change to one of collaboration, communication, mutual respect, and student success. This kind of environment was observed at Community College A, where the macro themes of increased student learning, increased student success, improved customer service, and a strong learning-centered culture clearly emerged from the perceptions of the study's participants. Furthermore, these perceptions strongly suggest that Student Affairs can play a critical role in this transformation. By creating a supportive atmosphere and a friendly environment, by providing easy access to resources for students, and (where possible) by creating or modifying policies and procedures with focus on student learning, Student Affairs can become an institutional integrator in the learning-centered process. These findings validate the premise of the Alpha Beta paradigm, that it is the demonstrated commitment of the institution to students in the broadest sense that is critical to learning-centeredness.

While efforts on the part of Student Affairs can have a positive impact on student success and the creation of a learning-centered environment, the factors of cooperation,

communication, and institutional support must be present to form a sustainable environmental change. Without this, support efforts are relegated to pockets of learning-centered change without any real coordination. This leads to role confusion, lack of understanding of the true meaning of learning-centeredness, and a sporadic approach to cultural change. This was observed at Community College B, where only two of the four macro themes were detected: increased student success and improved customer service. And while all of the four thematic antecedents were detected at Community College B (atmosphere, access, attitude, policies/procedures), they were not observed with the same breadth, depth, or intensity as was seen at Community College A. It is obvious that this is an institution still struggling with the transition to a learning-centered culture.

The key thematic antecedents that were identified in the statements of the study's participants provide excellent insight into the dynamic of learning-centered environmental change and institutional perceptions. These factors (attitude, atmosphere, access, policies/procedures) appear to be at least some of the specific, measurable components of environmental change that must be addressed in order to successfully increase the learning-centeredness of an institution. These factors could form the basis for an operational definition of learning-centered student affairs practice. Additional research should be conducted to validate these findings and to identify additional components of learning-centered student affairs practice that will assist Student Affairs professionals in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study and on the interviews from Community College A, the following recommendations are made on behalf of the focus institution and to

enlighten community college professionals interested in the role student affairs can play in the implementation of a learning-centered environment.

- Refocus institutional attention on the communication aspects of creating a collegewide learning-centered environment.
- Revisit training for all college personnel in their role and function within the learning-centered context.
- Insure there is a complete understanding of the concept of learning-centeredness and buy in by all college stakeholders.
- Provide institutional resources necessary to create a sustainable collegewide learning-centered environment.
- Recognize, encourage and support the important role that student affairs plays in creating and sustaining a collegewide learning-centered environment.
- Continue to reinforce the blending of student affairs and academic affairs in the creation of a learning-centered environment.

Topics for Further Study

The topic of student affairs role within the learning-centered context is a young yet important area of investigation. Further study is needed to identify additional factors that can impact student affairs role in creating a learning-centered environment as well as their role as institutional partners in this endeavor. Additional study is required to identify which institutional factors are part of the transformation that occurs when student affairs assumes the role of institutional integrator for the creation of a learning-centered environment. Finally, it needs to be determined how the new community college student success model will fit into the definition of a student affairs learning-centered environment. The following are additional recommendations for further study.

- Additional research needs to be done on the role that student affairs plays in the creation of a learning-centered environment at the community college.

- A study should be conducted that identifies additional components of student affairs practice that have an impact on student success and student learning.
- A study should be conducted to identify how student learning can be identified and documented within student affairs at a community college.
- A study should be done to identify additional institutional factors necessary for creating a sustainable learning-centered environment within a community college.
- A study needs to be conducted to determine the role leadership plays at the departmental level as well as the CEO/college president level in the creation of a sustainable learning-centered environment within a community college.

APPENDIX A
EXPERT PANEL

Dr. Terry O'Banion
President Emeritus
League for Innovation

Dr. Chuck Spence
Chancellor Contra Costa Community College District
Contra Costa, CA

Dr. George Boggs
President
American Association of Community Colleges
#1 Dupont Circle Washington D.C.

Dr. Judith Bilsky
Executive Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Student Success
Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education
Florida Dept. of Education
Tallahassee, FL

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY, STAFF, ADMINISTRATION

1. Name:
2. Position at college:
3. Number of years at college:
4. Does the college have a required student assessment program designed to identify specific areas in need of remediation

What is your perception?
5. Does the college have a mandatory program for class placement designed to work in tandem with the assessment program?

What is your perception?
6. Are all students required to explore with an academic advisor their educational goals every term?

What is your perception?
7. Are new students required to participate in orientation?

What is your perception?
8. Has the college made it clear that students must register before the first day of class?

What is your perception?
9. Has the college established an early academic alert system?

What is your perception?
10. Are students required to attend class regularly?

What is your perception?

11. Do faculty and staff members who are assigned responsibility for implementing the student success policies participate in developing and approving the policies?

What is your perception?

12. Is your impression of staff in admissions generally positive or negative?

Why?

13. Is your impression of staff in registration generally positive or negative?

Why?

14. Is your impression of staff in advisement generally positive or negative?

Why?

15. Is your impression of staff in career services generally positive or negative?

Why?

16. If you have observed changes in any of these areas within the past 5 years, please elaborate.

17. Does the quality of student services affect educational outcomes?

18. Does the physical environment of the student services office affect the educational outcomes?

19. What relationship do you perceive between the quality of the delivery of student services and students achieving their educational goals?

APPENDIX C STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Ethnicity
5. FTIC Yes No
6. Financial Aid/Scholarship Yes No
7. Student Status: Full Time Part Time
8. Freshman Sophomore (more than 30 semester hours earned)
Earned semester hours:
9. Educational goal: AA degree AS degree PSAV Other
10. Do you work? Occupation:
11. Family Income:
Under 30K 30 to 60K 60 to 100K over 100K
12. Are you a first generation college student? Yes No
13. Highest level of parents' education:
14. Was this institution your first choice for college?
15. Why are you here? cost location convenience other:
16. Does the college have a required student assessment program designed to identify specific areas in need of remediation?
What is your perception?

17. Does the college have a mandatory program for class placement designed to work in tandem with the assessment program?

What is your perception?

18. Are all students every term required to explore with an academic advisor their educational goals every term?

What is your perception?

19. Are new students required to participate in orientation?

What is your perception?

20. Has the college made it clear that students must register before the first day of class?

What is your perception?

21. Has the college established an early academic alert system?

What is your perception?

22. Are students required to attend class regularly?

What is your perception?

23. Is your impression of staff in admissions generally positive or negative?

Why?

24. Is your impression of staff in registration generally positive or negative?

Why?

25. Is your impression of staff in advisement generally positive or negative?

Why?

26. Is your impression of staff in career services generally positive or negative?

Why?

27. If you have observed changes in any of these areas within the past 5 years, please elaborate.

28. Does the quality of student services affect educational outcomes?
29. Does the physical environment of the student services office affect the educational outcomes?
30. What relationship do you perceive between the quality of the delivery of student services and students achieving their educational goals?

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

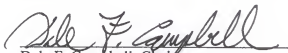
Helton M. Aldridge, Jr., was born September 10, 1946, in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended elementary school through the 4th grade in South St. Louis. At that time he began a series of moves with his family that would play an important role in his personal development over the next 8 years. Not attending a school for more than 2 years always made Helton the new kid; and just about the time he began adjusting to his environment and making friends, his family would move because of his father's job changes. In 1963, his father achieved the professional goal he had been working toward, a job with NASA and the assignment to a new space project called the Apollo program. This job moved the family from Texarkana, Texas, where Helton had attended 9th and 10th grade, to Las Cruces, New Mexico, home of White Sands Missile Testing Range. Helton spent his last 2 years of high school in New Mexico and graduated in 1965. On the day after his graduation, the family packed up and moved to Houston, Texas, where the next phase of the Apollo program was being initiated.

Helton had been accepted at a local 4-year university; he enrolled and began college. After 1 year it became obvious that the college was not for him. Not knowing exactly which way to turn, he enlisted in the Air Force in 1966. Four years later and after a lot of growing up, Helton was honorably discharged and moved to central Florida where his family had moved after his father was transferred to Cape Kennedy, again with the final phase of the Apollo program. With a new appreciation of education, Helton enrolled in Brevard Community College in 1971, and graduated with his AA degree in

the summer of 1972. Six months after graduation, he took a full-time position as the first Academic Advisor hired by Brevard Community College Student Services, a position he held for 13 years. During that time, he enrolled at the University of Central Florida and earned a B.S. degree in social science. As an adjunct faculty member, he also taught general psychology, sociology, and industrial psychology. In 1985, he was promoted to the position of Student Development Specialist at Brevard, and he began a very creative, exciting, and growth-filled tenure. In 1989, he received the Florida Association of Community Colleges exemplary practice award for student development. During this time, he enrolled at Norwich University, Vermont, and earned a Master of Arts degree in higher education administration. He had found his niche—student services and higher education.

Helton began the University of Florida (UF) doctoral program in January 1995, completing all course work as part of a practitioners' cohort, working with full-time U.F. faculty at the Deland site, and began work on his dissertation. In 1999 he was promoted to the position of Dean of Educational Services for Brevard's Palm Bay Campus. In September 1999, Helton was recognized by the National Council for Student Development and received the second place award in the Terry O'Banion Shared Journey exemplary practice national competition. In November 1999, Helton again was recognized when he won the University of Florida's James L. Wattenbarger Scholarship. In 2003, he was transferred to the Titusville Campus as Dean of Student Services and currently serves as Dean of Student Services for Brevard's Health Science Campus in Cocoa, Florida. Helton is married and is the father of one daughter, Shannon, an elementary school teacher in Orange County. He and his wife Paulette currently reside in Cocoa, Florida.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.



Dale F. Campbell, Chair
Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy
and Foundations

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.



David S. Honeyman
Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy
and Foundations

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.



Arthur Sandeen
Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy
and Foundations

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.



Lynn Hollingsworth Levery
Lecturer of Political Science

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the College of Education and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Dean, College of Education

Dean, Graduate School